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JONATHAN EDWARDS, 1703-1758: HIS THEORY
AND PRACTICE OF EVANGELISM

CONTINUED CONTENT

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George W. Long, Jr.
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JONATHAN EDWARDS, 1703-1758: HIS THEORY
AND PRACTICE OF EVANGELISM

Approved:

External Examiner _____ Date _____

Faculty Advisor _____ Date _____

Faculty Advisor _____ Date _____

Accepted:

Dean _____ Date _____

This thesis is dedicated to my wife and four children, who were without husband and father for many hours that it might be brought to completion.

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PREFACE

Jonathan Edwards has two claims to fame. He was known to his own age primarily as an evangelistic pastor, and he is still remembered chiefly in that role because of his connection with the "Great Awakening" of the middle eighteenth century. As his major works came to press rather late in his life, he drew the world's attention to himself as a logician and commanded high respect from theologians and philosophers alike, even those who disagreed with his position showing deference to his logic.

The "Great Awakening" was not simply a passing wave of emotional froth washing the shores of New England and then sinking back into the ocean of indifference to be forgotten. It came in the wake of, and seemingly as a result of, definite doctrinal preaching; and both the doctrine and the experience of the revival have left their mark, their particular flavor, upon the thought life and the religious practice of America and, to a lesser extent, of all Christendom--so much so that books are still being written about Jonathan Edwards, and the relative merits and demerits of the "Great Awakening" are still being debated.

This thesis seeks to present the great doctrinal concepts of Edwards that, as preached, made for revival and to examine his manner of communicating those concepts.

The research has been inspiring and deeply satisfying as a personal quest and has led to delightful associations with others who are making this two-hundredth anniversary of Edwards' death an occasion for a serious study of his works.

The investigation was concluded in the United States, and American spelling, style, and word usage have been followed in making the report. While several sets of Edwards' works were consulted, footnote references are to the two-volume Hickman edition except when otherwise indicated.

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CHAPTER I

THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

Jonathan Edwards preached, and men were shaken in their souls. They cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" and many of them subsequently had transporting experiences of joy. The flame was fanned and spread with the contagion of a forest fire under the preaching of Whitefield, and the "Great Awakening" went down as an amazing event in the religious history of America--an event often recalled to mind by subsequent stirrings of a similar sort. The awakening came to birth in the preaching of Jonathan Edwards--in the preaching of Jonathan Edwards to men of his time.

To seek for his theory and practice of evangelism is to probe at the very heart of the "Great Awakening" and to feel for the key that will enable one to understand much more clearly the whole history of American evangelism. This opening chapter undertakes to present the man, the character of his times, and the beginnings of the Awakening. This is by way of orientation, before delving into the inner motives and outer workings of Edwards' evangelism.

I. HIS LIFE

Jonathan Edwards began his life in the year 1703 at Windsor, Connecticut, a frontier town on the banks of

the Connecticut River on the very edge of civilization. The days of high-pitched Indian terror were past, but reasonable precautions were still in order. It was accepted as one of the conditions of life that livestock straying too far into the woods might fall to the Indians and that little boys should stay reasonably close to the village. The larger concerns of pilgrimage from across the seas and of extensive struggles with the French and the Indians were relegated to the past. Travel was such that only the more outstanding of the citizens would take horse occasionally and ride away to Boston. People were born, lived, and died with Windsor as their world. It was in this remote village that a life began which was destined to be studied with interest by men of various callings and various countries for hundreds of years.

In many respects there was promise of considerable success for the young life. He was the son of the minister, the Rev. Timothy Edwards, who served the town very successfully for about sixty years. Timothy Edwards was a man of great intellectual energy, very meticulous and careful. He was physically strong and thoroughly polished in manners. Although there was not in him the genius that was in his son, a genius that habitually distinguished between the more and the less important, there was undoubtedly in him intellectual vigour and preciseness and a concern for things

spiritual.¹ The paternal grandfather and great-grandfather of Jonathan Edwards were merchants in Hartford, Connecticut. They were well respected in their town and seem to have been men of unusual determination and strong convictions. The earliest known ancestor was the Rev. Richard Edwards, the great-great-grandfather of Jonathan, who was a clergyman in London in the time of Queen Elizabeth I. According to family tradition, he came originally from Wales.

Jonathan's mother was the former Esther Stoddard, daughter of the Rev. Solomon Stoddard who preceeded Jonathan Edwards as minister of Northampton with a very influential ministry that lasted fifty-seven years. She had been well educated in Boston and reputedly possessed a native intelligence surpassing that of her husband.

As one would expect, the home of Timothy and Mrs. Edwards provided many advantages, spiritual, moral and intellectual, to the children growing up under its care. There were eleven children, four older than Jonathan and six younger, Jonathan being the only son. A paragraph from a letter written by Mr. Edwards to his wife while he was away on military duty as a chaplain provides an excellent insight into what the home life must have been and

¹ Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A. M., ed. Edward Hickman (London: Ball, Arnold, and Co., 1840), I, ccli-cclii.

and an intimation of the spiritual atmosphere:

Remember my love to each of the children, to Esther, Elizabeth, Anne, Mary, Jonathan, Eunice, and Abigail. The Lord have mercy on and eternally save them all, with our dear little Jerusha! The Lord bind up their souls with thine and mine in the bundle of life. Tell the children, that I would have them, if they desire to see their father again, to pray daily for me in secret; and above all things to seek the favour of God in Christ Jesus, and that while they are young.²

This parent's attitude toward his children's relationship to God was not particularly uncommon among devout men of that day; and if there was a difference, it was in the degree, not in the kind. It is, nevertheless, worth noting as the environment in which the son was molded. Remembering also that Jonathan was very close to his father throughout their lifetime (the father died only two months before the son) and often discussed spiritual matters with him, will aid one in understanding Jonathan Edwards' attitude toward the evangelism of children.

Jonathan was educated at home until time for him to go away to college. He pursued his studies under the instruction of his father in the presence of his older sisters. An education received in this way may have been less systematic than that ordinarily given in the school, but the presence of more advanced studies and a variety of interests in the same room would challenge the boy's

² Ibid. p. ccli.

mind and open new avenues of thought. Moreover, Timothy Edwards was a good teacher. He was distinguished as a scholar, having a systematic mind with a keen interest in detail. He prepared other students besides his own children for college, and the colleges looked upon his instruction as excellent. When in college, Jonathan wrote to his father concerning one of his former students:

I have diligently searched into the circumstances of Stiles's examination, which was very short, and as far as I can understand, was to no other disadvantage than that he was examined in Tully's Orations: in which, though he had never construed before he came to New Haven, yet he committed no error in that or any other book, whether Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, except in Virgil, wherein he could not tell the preteritum of requiesco.³

It might seem that Stiles' achievements call for more attention than his weakness, but reports of this examination had evidently embarrassed Timothy Edwards. Jonathan was accorded a high standing upon his admission to college, which fact, along with his later achievements, indicates that his father's instruction was well administered and well received.

Not much is recorded concerning his intellectual progress in pre-college days; but Mr. Cutler, President of Yale College, wrote to Timothy Edwards, "I congratulate you upon his promising abilities and advances in learning";

³ Ibid., p. lviii.

and there is preserved an early bit of writing that illustrates the development of his mind at a very youthful age. Someone in the neighborhood had expressed a belief that the soul was material and would remain with the body until the resurrection. Jonathan, writing in a boyish hand without date, punctuation, or any division into sentences, returned the following comments:

I am informed that you have advanced a notion, that the soul is material, and attends the body till the resurrection; as I am a professed lover of novelty, you must imagine I am very much entertained by this discovery; (which, however old in some parts of the world, is new to us;) but suffer my curiosity a little further. I would know the manner of the kingdom before I swear allegiance: 1st, I would know whether this material soul keeps with (the body) in the coffin, and if so, whether it might not be convenient to build a repository for it; in order to which I would know what shape it is of, whether round, triangular, or four-square; or whether it is a number of long fine strings reaching from the head to the foot; and whether it does not live a very discontented life. I am afraid when the coffin gives way, the earth will fall in and crush it; but if it should choose to live above-ground, and hover about the grave, how big is it?-- whether it covers all the body; what it does when another body is laid upon it: whether the first gives way; and if so where is the place of retreat. But suppose that souls are not so big but ten or a dozen of them may be about one body; whether they will not quarrel for the highest place; and, as I insist much upon my honour and property, I would know whether I must quit my dear head, if a superior soul comes in the way: but above all, I am concerned to know what they do, where a burying-place has been filled twenty, thirty, or an hundred times. If they are a-top of one another, the uppermost will be so far off, that it can take no care of the body. I strongly suspect they must march off every time there comes a new set. I hope there is some other place provided for them but dust. The undergoing so much hardship, and being deprived of the body at last, will make them ill-tempered. I leave it

with your physical genius to determine, whether some medicinal applications might not be proper in such cases, and subscribe your proselyte, when I can have solution of these matters.⁴

This, from a boy about ten years of age, suggests a habit of considerable mental activity!

An education in the home of the Timothy Edwards family would have something more than an intellectual character. The principles of right and wrong, firmly believed and taught by precept and example, were mingled indistinguishably with intellectual pursuits and left their mark upon the inner, moral life of the young man. This must have been done naturally and happily, without a sense of undue repression. Jonathan accepted them, showed no signs of rebelling or of "sowing wild oats," and kept his father as a friend and counselor throughout his life.

There were indications very early in his life of a special concern for religion. This concern came into focus particularly during a time of unusual awakening in his father's congregation some years before Jonathan's entrance at college. At that time he and some other boys built a booth in a secluded part of a swamp where they would resort frequently for prayer. In these spiritual exercises he felt "in his element," finding real delight

⁴ Ibid., p. lviii.

in religious exercises. Looking back upon these experiences twenty years later, however, he did not regard them as an indication of saving grace but as something less. Perhaps this was because they wore off in the course of time, leaving him for an interval without the desire for secret prayer and open to sinful desires.

Some time during his college days he became increasingly uneasy about his salvation, which uneasiness was greatly intensified by an attack of pleurisy. His religious experiences began to take the form not of delight in spiritual things but of violent inward struggles. During this time he sought to throw off all wicked inclinations, to make resolutions and vows to God, and to practice religious duties although he was finding no pleasure in them. While he made the quest for salvation the main business of his life, he later expressed doubt as to its outcome. "I sought it after a miserable manner, which has made me sometime since to question whether ever it issued in that which was saving; being ready to doubt whether such miserable seeking ever succeeded."⁵

Just when and how he came to regard himself as a child of God, he in no place states. There came, however, late in his college career, something that he called a

⁵ Ibid., p. liv.

"new sense of things," and which he regarded as having changed his whole outlook upon life. It began with a new attitude toward the sovereignty of God. His mind had previously been full of objections against that doctrine, as it seemed to him to be an horrible one. Subsequently he became fully convinced of, and satisfied with, the sovereignty of God in his eternally disposing of men according to his sovereign pleasure. He accepted it, his mind came to rest upon it, and it became his delight. "Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God."⁶ Along with this came a new kind of attitude toward Christ and his work of redemption, and Edwards' mind was greatly drawn to thoughts of him and of the wonderful way of salvation by free grace in him. Edwards' later evangelism was fired by the reality of his own experience, being largely an attempt to interpret his own spiritual experience and make it applicable to the lives of others.

Before he was thirteen years of age he entered Yale College in New Haven, Connecticut, then numbering only thirty-one students and possessed of internal troubles. It was divided between three towns, each disputing for its location. One of the tutors at New Haven, a Mr. Johnson, somehow became so unpopular that year among the students

⁶ Ibid., p. lv.

that they, all thirteen of them, moved to Wethersfield. When the trustees later met and removed the unpopular teacher and employed Mr. Cutler, pastor of Canterbury, as president of the college, the students returned. In this struggling little college Jonathan Edwards learned. During his second year he read Locke's essay on the Human Understanding, not only grasping the meaning but finding more pleasure in it, as he said, "than the most greedy miser finds, when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold, from some newly discovered treasure."⁷

Jonathan Edwards' habit in reading books, other than the Bible, was not to accept their propositions unquestioned but to employ them as they might be of use to him in the pursuit of truth. He did not snatch up the treasure chest as such but eagerly collected the treasures within that commended themselves to him as worthy. The stress that Locke placed upon "perception" and "experience" was tremendously stimulating to the young reader. Certainly, in his later preaching, Edwards placed great emphasis upon the importance of the individual's personal experience of God as an essential to true religion. One cannot say whether this early introduction to Locke brought experience into focus in Edwards' mind, or whether Locke's essay found

⁷ Ibid., p. lix.

such an enthusiastic reader because Edwards already was possessed of corresponding notions. It is more likely that the reading of such powerful writers as Locke helped him to objectify and classify concepts for which his inquisitive mind was already groping. There is this difference between Edwards and Locke: If knowledge by perception meant to Locke that the mind is imprisoned within the senses, it meant no such thing to Edwards. Facts do speak to us, but they have a meaning because they have been given a meaning by the intelligence behind them. Their true significance can be understood only by the regenerate mind.⁸

A habit encouraged in his father's home and followed throughout life was that of reading and thinking with a pen in hand and of writing down thoughts as they came to him, capturing any light that momentary inspiration might give. Occasionally he copied a sentence from another, but his notes for the most part were his own thoughts which he later sought to follow through to their conclusion. This helped him to clarify his thinking and guarded him against mental laziness.

In 1720, at seventeen years of age, he finished the regular college course at the head of his class. After

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, Images or Shadows of Divine Things, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 22.

this he studied there for two more years and was licensed to preach. His first charge was a small pastorate in New York City. There he preached very acceptably for about eight months; but when they wished to call him as their permanent minister he declined, believing that the particular circumstances of the congregation did not afford the greatest opportunities for usefulness. After a summer at home in Windsor, he returned to New Haven, where he was granted his degree of Master of Arts and was elected a tutor in the college. He did not begin this work until there was a vacancy in June, 1724, and spent the previous winter and spring at New Haven in study.

At this time the college was in a period of more severe crisis than it had ever undergone before. The unrest of 1716 had not settled after the engaging of Cutler as President. In 1721 there was a universal insurrection of the students which, though finally quieted, resulted in a state of extreme disorder and insubordination. The climax came in 1722 when Cutler, with another tutor and two neighboring ministers, left the Congregational Church and declared himself an Episcopalian. It came as a shock to the directors and to many of the students. Ironically, the "conversion" to Episcopalianism came about through a library of books that the directors had procured from England for the college. This early and startling experience

may have added considerably to the feeling of urgency behind Edwards' later polemic against Arminian doctrine, which was then prevalent in the Anglican church.

For the next four years the college was without a head, the trustees acting by turn as vice president, each for a month at a time. The real burden of responsibility, as well as of labor, fell upon the three young tutors: William Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and Daniel Edwards, Jonathan's young uncle. These men conducted the affairs of the school amazingly well, especially considering their youth and inexperience. Order was restored, new diligence was inspired among the students, and in a short time the college was flourishing and prospering more than it had for a long while. All three of them were kept extremely busy with regular instruction and the knotty, fatiguing administrative problems. Edwards found the affairs of the college very taxing upon him; and, while he applied himself with diligence and did the work well, he lamented the lack of time for pursuing his own intellectual studies.

When the church at Northampton, Massachusetts, a town of eighty-two years' standing with about two hundred families, invited him to come to them as associate to the Rev. Mr. Solomon Stoddard, he accepted their call, was ordained, and installed on February 15, 1727. He was then twenty-three years of age and entering into relationships

with a congregation which he was to serve for the next twenty-three years. In 1729 Stoddard died, and Edwards became the pastor of the church. In the meantime, he had married Miss Sarah Pierrepont, a beautiful young lady of a distinguished family, her father, the Rev. Mr. James Pierrepont, being one of the principal founders of Yale College, a trustee, and for some time a professor. She possessed a rare combination of spiritual depth, social delicacy, and sound discretion.

When Edwards accepted the call to Northampton, the people were not strangers to revival. Under Stoddard's ministry they had repeatedly witnessed revivals of religion, especially in 1679, 1683, 1690, 1712, and 1718. Between 1718 and the calling of Edwards there had been a period of marked decline, showing itself in loose conduct among the young, decay of family government, and indifference toward the Sabbath. Shortly after Edwards' arrival, Stoddard was privileged to witness another tide of spiritual interest during which about twenty persons were believed to be savingly converted. This was a time of great inspiration to the young associate, who commented, "I have reason to bless God for the great advantage I had by it."⁹ As the new minister began his leadership in Northampton, both he and

⁹ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lxxx.

the people to whom he preached were accustomed to thinking in terms of and looking for revival.

The awakening that so strongly punctuated his ministry began in 1734. It began among the young people, and before it subsided it had so affected the whole town that people in general looked upon the things of religion as the most important things in life. Late in 1735 interest began to wane, but there continued to be conversions from time to time. Then again in 1740 the tide of revival rose, continuing in great power until it began to subside in 1742. The nature and causes of these revivals will be discussed later, in connection with the thought and work of the evangelist. This brief sketch of his early life is completed by mentioning the troubles that ended his ministry at Northampton and the circumstances of his life in Stockbridge and at Princeton.

The beginning of the difficulties was in 1744, six years before his final separation from the church. At this time Edwards was informed that certain of his young people had books in their possession which were corrupting the thought and conversation of them and their friends (the books pertained to midwifery). With the approval of the congregation, Edwards formed a committee to look into the matter; and he read a list of the names of young people who were asked to appear before the committee. This list

was a long one, naming both accused and witnesses, and involved almost every important family in the community. Unfortunately, when the list was read from the pulpit, the minister did not state which persons were the accused and which were witnesses. Many of the heads of families, perhaps fearing that their own children might be among the accused, changed their minds about prosecuting the case and did not send their children to the committee meeting. This encouraged some of the accused to stay away, and others conducted themselves somewhat insolently, thus keeping the discipline from being carried through.

There may have been other roots of bitterness. It is usual that when a man of great power and conviction works, many will be helped and some will be alienated; but previous to this incident there is no indication that Edwards had misunderstandings of any serious sort with his congregation. After this failure of discipline, his influence upon the young people suffered. It was altogether an unfortunate affair which perhaps could have been avoided. Edwards acted according to his convictions, to his own hurt, which was characteristic of him. That he was not one hundred percent sure of his action, however, is indicated in one of his little personal notations in which he asked himself whether it was really wrong for the young people to inform themselves on facts of this nature and whether

their talking about them was an offense to be prosecuted. But the action was taken, and the unhappy outcome of it virtually put an end to his usefulness at Northampton.

The actual occasion of separation came some years later when he expressed himself in opposition to the "half-way covenant," a movement in the interest of expediency which admitted to church membership persons who made no profession of a spiritual conversion, and to the practice established by Stoddard of offering the Lord's Supper to the unconverted as a saving ordinance.

Edwards, when coming to Northampton, had accepted the status quo but had gradually become convinced from the study of Scripture that only those who make a profession of real Christianity should be admitted to the sacrament. His views, if applied, would exclude many from the sacrament who had been accustomed to partaking. Consequently, when his position became known, it caused a great up-roar in the town, and many began to demand his dismissal as the only thing that would satisfy them. The actual proceedings were long-drawn-out and painful, but their results were determined before they began. He was dismissed from his church in June, 1750. Again he had stood by his convictions, to his own personal hurt, this time knowing quite clearly what the outcome would be. He himself maintained his integrity and a remarkable objectivity throughout the whole

miserable affair. His farewell sermon and a repentant letter from the chief opposer provide a good commentary upon his own attitude and deportment.¹⁰

After this sad departure from Northampton, Edwards accepted a call to Stockbridge as minister to the few white settlers and as missionary to the Indians. Here he faced a critical problem in that one family had gained domination of the little settlement and was grossly misusing mission funds for its own embellishment. The members of this family were related to members of the Northampton Church who had vigorously opposed Edwards. Having done all they could to prevent his being called to Stockbridge, they were prepared to oppose his ministry before it began.

When Edwards perceived the hurt to the Indians resulting from the misuse of funds, he felt in duty bound to intervene, realizing but not regarding the fire that this would bring upon his own head. Through a series of letters to the Commissioners of the mission in Boston and in London, he succeeded eventually in persuading them to make an investigation which totally discredited the family in power. Never popular in the settlement, life became so disagreeable for the family opposing Edwards that they moved. His missionary work was made difficult also by the fact that

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. ccxl, clxvii.

two tribes of Indians who were traditional enemies of one another had been invited to the settlement, a circumstance that caused from time to time a tide of suspicion. Furthermore, at his age, Edwards was never able to master the language sufficiently to enable him to conduct services without an interpreter. His championship of the Indians' interests gained for him their confidence, however, and he did perhaps his best work as a missionary when they came to him individually with their problems. The seven years at Stockbridge witnessed the completion of most of his major written works, which, although they had been long in preparation, he had not found time to complete in Northampton.

When he was called in December, 1757, to the presidency of Princeton College, he accepted with hesitancy, feeling that it would put an end to his study and writing. He took the oath of office and assumed his presidential duties on February 16, 1758. Five weeks later, on March 24, he died from complications arising from an inoculation for smallpox. One of his eleven children, his namesake, later became a president of Princeton.

Such is a brief account of the facts of his life. It does not explain the revival but simply introduces the evangelist. A summary view of the situation to which he addressed himself follows.

II. HIS TIMES

The state of religion in 1727 was widely different from what it was when the Puritan immigrants first pushed their way into the wilderness and set themselves to stand against its rigours. The religious fervor that had prompted most of the immigrants to leave their homes and seek a hazardous freedom on a little-known continent had largely lost its force during the four succeeding generations. As early as 1678, Increase Mather had lamented that the body of the rising generation was a poor, perishing, and (except the Lord pour down his Spirit) an undone generation. There were several reasons for this. In the first place, children growing up in the Colonies had not tasted the bitterness of persecution for their faith and were inclined to take for granted and only half appreciate the heritage that their fathers had labored to establish. Furthermore, a new world was unfolding before them. There were frontiers to be conquered and there was farming to be done. The affairs of this life gained in importance before their eyes, while the things of the life to come faded. With the publication of Sir Isaac Newton's Principia in 1687, setting forth the principle of gravitation, a new realm for exploration was revealed which began to absorb interest that might otherwise have been devoted to religion.

The ministers themselves were suffering from a dimming of vision. As the crisis of separation from the land of their fathers and of seeking a new home passed into the background, and as life lost the big challenge and settled into a daily routine, something of the heroic dropped from their preaching. The doctrines remained, the system was precise, but somehow the living force that captures the imagination and binds the soul to the sovereign God was lacking. Some of the ministers in their preaching showed the influence of the new humanistic interest, more emphasis being placed upon man and his possibilities than upon God and his prerogatives. People adhered to the church, but all too often their lives were not changed. Ministers, noting the drop in the number who could rightly be admitted to communion under the strict terms that required a profession of and good evidence of a real experience of grace, began to cast about for a means of allowing communion on lesser terms. Thus a compromise came about in the half-way covenant:

Originally the Congregational churches were formed of those only who by a profession of an experience of saving grace could be accepted as visible saints, but owing to the great decline of such professions, the Massachusetts Synod of 1662 sanctioned an additional "covenant membership" of such as could offer an intellectual faith and a desire to assume the obligations

of the Christian life.¹¹

This "half-way covenant," as it came to be called, admitted to the privileges and prerogatives of church membership with the exception of the Lord's Supper those who led decent and respectable lives although they "might give no evidence of conversion and had neither the ability nor the willingness to make profession of religious experience."¹²

In the Northampton neighborhood Edwards' grandfather had brought about another relaxation by admitting all the parish to the Lord's Supper, viewing the sacrament as a possible means of grace for the unregenerate. Membership tended thus to rest on "moral sincerity."

Rather than allow a growing tension between those adherents who could partake of communion and those who, by reason of not being able to testify to a change of heart, could not (the latter in many cases being in the majority), most of the churches of New England eased the tension by accepting Stoddard's views and considering the Lord's supper as a saving ordinance, open to all. Looking back upon it, one can see that, had the requirements remained

¹¹ Francis A. Christie, "Jonathan Edwards," Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), VI, 31.

¹² "Half-way Covenant," The Encyclopedia Americana (1949 ed.), XIII, 636.

rigid and strict, there may have been serious trouble in the divided congregations, and the church may have lost prestige among a large number of people; but it would have remained truer to the commands of Christ and, while smaller, would have borne a clearer, more definite testimony. As it was, the churches eventually found that by yielding to temptation and acting according to expediency rather than according to principle they had allowed something that was not expedient. Their rolls became crowded with members who were not real Christians and who did not claim to be. The sacraments lost their true significance. Unregenerate parents presented their children for baptism; the children grew up to be men and women of the world, often devoid of any spiritual understanding, and yet members of the church.

These compromises, offering a covenant membership to the unregenerate and admitting the whole community to the Lord's Supper, were encouraged by humanistic, Arminian tendencies, and they in turn strengthened those same tendencies. Was not a man's standing in the congregation dependent upon his horizontal relationship with the visible church rather than upon his experience of divine forgiveness? Should not the minister speak to him in terms of what he could accomplish as a human being rather than in terms of sin and salvation and sovereign works of God which he could not understand? For the most part the ministers

said, "No!" Some of them swung to the new doctrines, but most of them remained true to their Calvinistic theology. Yet they were not holding the people, and the new doctrines were gaining. Ola Elizabeth Winslow suggests that the mighty, incomprehensible God of Calvin had been lost sight of in the preaching of his system of doctrine.¹³ Something like that is usually the case when religion is on the wane. The system may remain much the same, the theology unchanged, and yet the power be lacking.

Jonathan Edwards came preaching the old doctrine, but with a new power; and with his preaching came the stirrings of revival.

III. THE GREAT AWAKENING

The "Great Awakening" might be said to have begun with Edwards' own spiritual experience when, while in college, he came to have a "new sense of things." He did not actually say that this was his conversion, but certainly it was the great change in his life. It was centered around his recognition of the sovereignty of God and led to a new kind of appreciation of and ideas about Christ and the work of redemption. This experience was more than a new intellec-

¹³ Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 150.

tual slant. The realization that came to him stirred his emotions powerfully and overwhelmed him with a sense of the glory and beauty of God. It came upon him first as he read from I Timothy 1:17, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. . . . I . . . went to pray to God that I might enjoy him; and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do, with a new sort of affection. . . . From about that time I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them.¹⁴

It was a change from a reluctant acceptance of the doctrine of God's sovereignty to a frame of mind in which he thought God's power to dispose of all things, including men, according to his will, as a wonderful reality. It gave Edwards a new outlook upon life. When he finished college and began to preach, men perceived a new note in his preaching. The old doctrines were not merely laid out as true but were lifted up as something wonderful and pressed upon the hearers with all the enthusiasm of a young heart that had found them supremely satisfying.

¹⁴ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lv.

Perhaps this is the note that had been lacking in New England preaching and that had, by its absence, allowed the hearts of many to turn to Arminian humanism and those of others to grow cool toward all religion. Edwards, speaking fervently and enthusiastically out of the fulness of his own heart's experience, made the old doctrine more attractive than the new.¹⁵ When he preached at the public lecture in Boston on July 8, 1731, on the subject, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," the older clergy were delighted to find in him such an able champion of the traditional Calvinism. The theology that he preached was not new, but the depth and reality of his personal experience behind it made it powerful.

Out of his profound experience, fundamentally, grew the awakening. He was, first of all, as Warfield says, a "man of faith."¹⁶ In interpreting this faith, he had at his disposal a powerful mind, a vivid imagination, and a logical acuteness of the first order. He had a vital message to present, and it was buttressed with strong proof from Scripture and drawn before his audiences with a vividness that would not let them escape its meaning. He preached

¹⁵ Winslow, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, Studies in Theology (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 528.

doctrine, and the doctrine, over a period of time, bore fruit in revival. In an age when great numbers were carelessly deriving assurance simply from the fact that their names were on the membership roll or that their parents had been members, Edwards stressed the individual's responsibility to God.

Revival did not begin immediately. For a number of years after Stoddard's death, there was a decline of interest in religion. However, early in 1732 there began to be a turning. This showed itself first in the attitude of the young people, who began to turn from practices that were regarded as immoral, and, secondly, in an increasing interest throughout the congregation in the matter of personal salvation. In 1734 Edwards suggested to the young people that they assemble for prayer and Christian fellowship one evening each week. This they did, and their example was followed by the older people. With the surge of interest on the part of the congregation, a new power came into Edwards' ministry. About this time, prompted by the rise of a violent controversy in New England over the Arminian doctrines, he preached a series of sermons on the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. These convinced many that they could be justified only by the righteousness of Christ, and in a short time five or six persons were suddenly converted. Interest in the town was thus awakened,

and it increased during the winter and spring of 1735 until, as Edwards said, the town "was never so full of love, nor so full of joy, nor yet so full of distress, as it was then."¹⁷ Everyone seemed primarily concerned about his own salvation. Every day people were professing conversion. Within six months more than three hundred persons were judged by Edwards to have been savingly converted. Ten of these were above ninety years of age, and fifty were above forty, while one was only four. At one time the membership of the church was about six hundred and twenty and included almost the whole adult population of the town.

Visitors came from all the neighboring towns to witness the phenomenon. They returned to tell what they had seen, many of them having been converted, and the revival spread. The meetings were characterized by an eagerness on the part of those crowding the meetinghouses to learn of God; and often there would be outbreaks of weeping, some for sorrow, others for joy. The events aroused a new expectancy among the people of New England. Ministers and members alike came to be convinced that the gospel today could have as remarkable effects as it had in the first century. They were encouraged to pray, and the ministers were encouraged to preach, expecting results. This changed

¹⁷ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lxxxv.

attitude resulted in new outbreaks of revival. Edwards and other leading ministers were invited to preach in various pulpits, and their enthusiasm, fired by revival experiences at home, kindled new fires. New England became religiously self-conscious. People in all walks of life began to look within and to ask themselves how they stood in the sight of God. All over the land a spirit of tense expectancy developed.

The real over-flow awaited the coming of an outsider. In George Whitefield were combined qualities that well suited him for the part he was to play. His flaming zeal, great eloquence, powerful voice, and innate ability to sense the mood of a congregation, gave him power to grip the already aroused feelings of the people and to press for decisions. He preached everywhere--not only in churches but in the open fields--and wherever he went it was the same. Great crowds attended his preaching, and thousands responded to his call. For the most part, the leaders of the church supported his work, some with qualms, but few with open criticism. The revival swept America in much the same way and at the same time that the Wesleyan revival swept England.

With the enthusiasm, however, came the danger of excesses. The sentiment of the times was such as to carry both tremendous spiritual blessings and widespread religious abuses. While some were stirred to the depths of their

emotions by their genuine experience of God, others made the mistake of cultivating excitement for its own sake. The mixed character of the "Great Awakening" has given rise to widely different opinions about it.

This study is not concerned with the "Great Awakening" as such but with its roots and first-fruits in the thinking and preaching of Jonathan Edwards. Attention will be focused upon the elements in the ministry of Edwards that brought revival and upon what he sought to accomplish through evangelism. An understanding of the attitude of this mental and spiritual giant toward the phenomenon of revival should aid in evaluating the Awakening of the eighteenth century and in judiciously scrutinizing the evangelism of every age.

CHAPTER II

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The Apostle Peter wrote (I Peter 5:6), "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Jonathan Edwards preached the sovereignty and holiness of God with such power and persistence and with such inexorable logic that his hearers were brought low before God; and a great many of them, in the course of the revivals, tasted a measure of exaltation. Edwards' great concern was for the glory of God. No one can read for any considerable time in any part of his writings without becoming conscious of this emphasis. It was an emphasis rather than an obsession, because other aspects of Christian truth were not omitted; yet the sovereignty of God, and all things pertaining to his exaltation, formed the core of Edwards' preaching, about which the other aspects of his theology took their places.

Not only was the doctrine of God's sovereignty central in his theology, but it was also at the very heart of his evangelism. Calvinists have sometimes been accused of ruling out evangelism by their insistence upon God's sovereignty; but here is one Calvinist who believed it and preached it and who turned it to the use of evangelism. He wrote:

I think I have found that no discourses have been more remarkably blessed, than those in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty, with regard to answering the prayers, or succeeding the pains [rewarding the earnestness], of natural men, continuing such, have been insisted on. I never found so much immediate saving fruit, in any measure, of any discourses I have offered to my congregation, as some from these words, Rom. 3:19. "That every mouth may be stopped;" endeavouring to show from thence, that it would be just with God for ever to reject and cast off mere natural men.¹

He asserted that his most effective evangelistic sermons were those insisting upon God's absolute sovereignty.

This chapter is concerned with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God as Edwards inherited it, as he experienced it, as he understood it, and as he applied it.

I. THE DOCTRINE IN HISTORY

A firm conviction of the sovereignty of God has always been the keystone of Calvinism. The so-called five points of Calvinism--total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints--are simply points at which it has clashed with other systems of thought and been challenged and defended. No one of these gives the characteristic attitude of the Calvinist or even begins to convey the

¹ Jonathan Edwards, "Narrative of Surprising Conversions," The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A. M., ed. Edward Hickman (London: Ball, Arnold, and Co., 1840), I, 353.

thrill which the true Calvinist experiences in contemplating his real theme, the Sovereign God. All of these "points" are parts of Calvinism but are simply among the "spokes," while the sovereignty of God is the very "hub" of the wheel, the central truth which gives meaning to all the parts.

The Traditional Doctrine

For the purposes of this study, the traditional doctrine is that which was embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith and adopted by the Scottish General Assembly in 1647, the Synod of Philadelphia in 1729, the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., in 1787, the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1861, and many other reformed groups.

It stems from the biblical revelation of God as Creator and Sustainer of all life and specifically from such passages as Ephesians 1:11 which teach that he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

It states: "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or con-

tingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."²

It also states that "some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death."³

The perplexities inherent in the doctrine are obvious. How can God ordain whatsoever comes to pass without becoming the author of sin and without violating the will of the creature? The dilemma was expressed clearly by Augustine in the fourth century as he summarized Cicero's objections to God's foreknowledge:

What then did Tully fear in this prescience, that he framed such detestable arguments against it? Verily this, that if all events were known before they came to pass, they should come to pass according to that foreknowledge. And if they come so to pass, then God knows the certain order of things beforehand, and consequently the certain order of the causes; and if He know a certain order of causes in all events, then are all events disposed by fate: which if it be so, we have nothing left in our power, nothing in our will: "which granted," says he, "the whole course of humanity is overturned: law, correction, praise, disgrace, exhortation, prohibition, all are to no end: nor is there any justice in punishing the bad and rewarding the good."⁴

To this objection Augustine answered that, when

² The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (revised edition; Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1956), pp. 23-24.

³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴ Saint Augustine, The City of God (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1950), p. 152.

Tully saw an apparent dilemma and chose human freedom rather than divine foreknowledge, instead of making men free, he made them blasphemous. "But the religious mind chooses them both, confesses and confirms them both."⁵

God doth both know all things ere they come to pass, and we do all things willingly, which we do not feel ourselves and know ourselves directly enforced to. We hold . . . that nothing follows fate . . . we neither deny an order of causes wherein the will of God is all in all, neither do we call it by the name of fate.⁶

It is true, said Augustine, that "all things should fall out as He spoke, and meant to have them"; but "it does not follow that nothing should be left free to our will," because human wills are within the scope of that which God foreknew, and it is evident that when we will we are willing freely. Moreover, a man does not sin because God foreknew that he would sin, but God foresaw that "man himself would sin, who if he had not been willing, he had not sinned."⁷

The reader of Augustine feels that in the last analysis his treatment was a confession and an affirmation, rather than an explanation.

The same was true of Calvin. He noted that all

⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

do not have equal opportunity to hear the gospel and that among those who hear it there is a diversity in their readiness to receive it, which facts he attributed to God's eternal election, and in which he saw the wonderful depth of divine judgment.⁸ In a subsequent chapter he affirmed that the destined destruction of reprobate persons is procured by themselves.⁹ Having stated his position thus, he devoted a considerable section in his Institutes to the objections of those who consider it most unreasonable that some should be predestinated to salvation and others to destruction. But the reader feels again that, however arguments may be marshaled, a dilemma remains.

Alternatives to Calvinism are Arminianism and fatalism. Arminianism, fearing lest God be made the author of sin, turns to human free agency with an emphasis which Calvinists believe militates against the glory of God. Fatalists, on the other hand, draw implications from the doctrine of God's sovereignty that lead them to a despairing belief that man has no freedom and therefore no responsibility.

Actually, various shades of doctrine have developed

⁸ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. John Allen (seventh American edition; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, n.d.), II, 170.

⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

that touch upon the subject of God's sovereignty. The early Lutherans, apprehensive of leaving the destiny of souls to divine decree, looked to the Church and its use of the means of grace, believing that "in Word and Sacrament, objectively, always and for everyone, saving power is certainly present."¹⁰ J. K. S. Reid, writing in the Scottish Journal of Theology, cites Heppe as going so far as "to compare the Calvinist distinction between elect and not elect with that in Lutheranism between baptised and not baptised."¹¹ Calvinists, of course, objected that this amounted to a "removal of salvation out of the hand of God Himself, and out of the immediate personal relation of God with men, . . . a darkening of the glory of faith."¹²

When one wonders at the controversy that rages and has raged about the apparently conflicting doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the free agency of man and goes back to Scripture to seek answers at their source, he finds that both are accepted there as axiomatic truths: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4); "For there are certain men crept

¹⁰ J. K. S. Reid, "The Office of Christ in Predestination: I," Scottish Journal of Theology, I (June, 1948), 170-171.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 170.

¹² Ibid.

in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation" (Jude 4); "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Therefore, the struggle to relate them continues.

The Contemporary Status of the Doctrine

Someone has said that it takes a high degree of piety to hold the Calvinistic doctrine; that is, if one is to attribute absolute sovereignty to God and not rebel against it, he must have a high regard for God. As already noted, Jonathan Edwards began his ministry when religion was at a low ebb in the Colonies. In the Church of England an Arminian theology prevailed which rested salvation on human moral effort as well as on divine grace. The movement was spreading to Connecticut. In 1729 Daniel Dwight, born in Northampton and related to the distinguished Partridge family in Hatfield, abandoned Congregationalism for the English Church. Edwards felt that he detected Arminian tendencies in some of his own neighbors, especially in a prominent and influential cousin, Israel Williams, who was a large landowner and a holder of public office and who came to be known as "Lord of the Valley." Calvinism was still "on the books" of the people (in their creeds, confessions, and texts), but it was losing its place in their hearts.

Edwards arose as a champion of the doctrine of God's sovereignty at a time when it had lost much of its freshness and appeal and when Arminianism had gained sufficient foothold in the Colonies to occasion heated debate when the cardinal Calvinistic doctrine was again advanced with vigor.

II. THE DOCTRINE IN EDWARDS' EXPERIENCE

If one questions why the single doctrine of the Sovereignty of God deserves separate treatment in a dissertation on evangelism, he needs only to read the forthcoming quotation from Edwards. It is of supreme importance, as it colors his entire lifework and provides the key to understanding why men responded to his evangelistic appeals.

His Profound "Conversion" to the Doctrine

It is not enough to say that he believed in and preached the sovereignty of God. How he himself felt toward that doctrine is vital. The doctrine might be preached in such a way as to make men hate God and turn from him in resentment and discouragement, or it might be preached in such a way as to bring men to love him and and rejoice in his excellence. The difference depends largely upon how the minister himself feels. There is evidence that when Edwards preached the sovereignty of God, he proclaimed it as something inexpressibly wonderful--as a thing

which filled his own soul with the greatest delight. Looking back after some years upon an experience of his college days, Edwards related how he came to feel as he did toward God's sovereignty:

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life; and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice in thus eternally disposing of men, according to his sovereign pleasure. But never could give an account how, or by what means, I was thus convinced, not in the least imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it; but only that now I saw further, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it. However, my mind rested in it; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections. And there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, with respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this; so that I scarce ever have found so much as a rising of an objection against it, in the most absolute sense, in God showing mercy to whom he will show mercy, and hardening whom he will. God's absolute sovereignty and justice, with respect to salvation and damnation, is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of any thing that I see with my eyes; at least it is so at times. But I have often, since that first conviction, had quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty than I had then. I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so.

.....

Not long after I first began to experience these things, I gave an account to my father of some things that had passed in my mind. I was pretty much affected by the discourse we had together; and when the discourse was ended, I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place

in my father's pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, as I know not how to express.--I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together: it was a sweet, and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness.¹³

Somehow, in the experience of which Edwards spoke, the doctrine against which he had previously had many objections and which had seemed to him an "horrible doctrine" became a "delightful conviction." Other ministers have had similar experiences. Charles H. Spurgeon recalls:

At times I wickedly thought God a most heartless tyrant, because He did not answer my prayer; and then at others I thought, "I deserve His displeasure; if He sends me to hell, He will be just."¹⁴

Edwards sat and viewed the clouds and sky for long periods in order to behold the "sweet glory" of God in them, especially in the thunder-storm which before had always terrified him.

Scarce any thing, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. . . . I felt God, if I may so speak, at the first appearance of a thunder-storm; and used to take the opportunity, at such times, to fix myself in order to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic

¹³ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, liv-lv.

¹⁴ Russell H. Conwell, Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, The World's Great Preacher (n.p.: Edgewood Publishing Co., 1892), p. 91.

and awful voice of God's thunders, which oftentimes was exceedingly entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God.¹⁵

A. M. Ramsey calls attention to the fact that the word "glory" in the English versions of the Old Testament is a translation of the Hebrew word Kabod, which "denotes the revealed being or character of Yahveh, and also a physical phenomenon whereby Yahveh's presence is made known."¹⁶ "There can be no question that the presence of Yahveh was often connected with a storm of thunder and lightning."¹⁷ The word Kabod appears significantly in the storm-picture in Psalm 29. It is linked with his holiness and suggests a union of sovereignty and righteousness which is the essence of the divine character. "History, human life is under the government of a righteous power that rules the world, and is not devoted merely to satisfying the unethical desires of a petty nation or tolerating its sins."¹⁸

Edwards' intense feelings were more than a passing phase. He wrote: "After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and

¹⁵ Edwards, loc. cit.

¹⁶ Arthur Michael Ramsey, The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), p. 9.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 13, citing G. B. Gray, "Isaiah," International Critical Commentary, pp. 106-7.

had more of that inward sweetness. . . . I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year."¹⁹

Ola Winslow says:

The story of his intellectual life is not, as some have supposed, the story of a man who denied his young raptures, repudiated his visions, and became a cold logician, proving salvation by line and rule only. Calvinism did not for him destroy mysticism. Theology did not deny ecstasy. It merely provided an explanation and made a place for visions in the orthodox scheme of things, as was all-important in 1721.

.....

As life pressed in upon him and the making of many books became increasingly important, there was less time for the woods, as in most adult lives. Maturity also took its toll, and raptures presently became more bearable; but to the end of his life his personal experience of religion was an emotional experience, similar in kind to the ecstasies of his student days.²⁰

His Resultant Attitude toward the Doctrine

Edwards loved to think of God as Sovereign. The experience that brought him his "new sense of things" hinged upon divine sovereignty. It is significant that in making notes of what he believed to be the distinguishing marks of a true Christian he listed first a true knowledge of the glory and excellency of God, so that God would be his portion, and God's glory his great concern. The notes

¹⁹ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lv.

²⁰ Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. 79, 81.

referred to were made early in his life and reveal his attitude before he had any considerable knowledge of doctrine or of the writings of others. Toward the end of his life, he wrote:

Though it seems to me, that in some respects I was a far better Christian, for two or three years after my first conversion, than I am now; and lived in a more constant delight and pleasure; yet of late years, I have had a more constant and full sense of the absolute sovereignty of God, and a delight in that sovereignty.²¹

These parallel passages represent his own experience, that which he tried to relate and interpret in terms of the lives of others. His evangelism may be considered as an attempt to lead others to a similar experience of God.

If Edwards felt thus about God's sovereignty, one cannot but think that a spark of his enthusiasm would show itself in his sermons and kindle something of the same in his hearers. Some of his revival sermons were undoubtedly stern; but if in the gathering storm-clouds of judgment his hearers saw something of the glory that Edwards saw, that would be one plausible reason for his power as a preacher. When he preached God's sovereignty, did they see "majesty and meekness joined together"? Was it a "sweet, and gentle, and holy majesty" that they saw? Was there in his preaching some hint of the "awful sweetness" and the "high, and great,

²¹ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, xc.

and holy gentleness" that formed a part of the preacher's own experience?

These questions are not easy to answer, because reading a manuscript is not the same as listening to a man preach. Francis Christie says that Edwards "fused the iron logic of [Calvinism] . . . with a rapture of mystic communion." Iron and rapture joined together would make a powerful alloy, indeed! The fact that some persons under conviction of sin declared themselves willing for God to glorify himself in their damnation suggests that they had caught sight of the glory of God in such a way as to make it appear more important to them than their own salvation.²² Edwards regarded this attitude as a sign that salvation had already come to them. Edwards' personal experience entered into his preaching in such a way as to give a definite warmth to a Calvinism that might otherwise have been cold and unattractive. This is one reason why his preaching had such power to move people.

III. THE DOCTRINE IN EDWARDS' RATIONALE

Edwards' interpretation of the doctrine of God's sovereignty influenced all of his works and was laboriously defended in his "Careful and Strict Inquiry into the

²² Edwards, "Narrative of Surprising Conversions," Works, op. cit., I, 353.

Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of Will." Tracing this argument in its intricacies was not considered necessary, but the broad outlines of his concept are of importance here since they affected the emphases of his preaching. The focus of his doctrine upon the glory of God, its relationship to the salvation of men, and its relationship to human responsibility are especially pertinent.

Its Focus upon the Glory of God

According to John Macmurray, most people think of religion as a means for satisfying natural desires:

Most of us think of religion as giving us something; as consoling us in trouble; helping us in difficulties, strengthening us in the face of death, and so on. As if God existed for our sakes! As if our success and our safety and our happiness were the meaning of the whole world! So long as we look to art and religion in this way--for the satisfaction of our private desires, our natural private desires--we can't begin to understand what they are, and all our ideas about them will be delusions, expressing only our vanity and self-conceit.²³

In studying Jonathan Edwards, one gains the impression that his religion was entirely diverse from the type lamented by Macmurray and that his evangelism was simply a "by-product" of a ministry bent on glorifying God. Certainly he would not have men saved at the expense of God's justice. God was foremost in his thoughts, and men took their places

²³ John Macmurray, Reason and Emotion (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1935), p. 53

in the great scheme of things, the whole scheme being for God's own glory. After powerfully arguing God's worthiness to be highly regarded and the fitness of God's having a supreme regard to himself, Edwards observed:

I should think that these things might incline us to suppose, that God has not forgot himself, in the ends which he proposed in the creation of the world; but that he has so stated these ends, (however self-sufficient, immutable, and independent,) as therein plainly to show a supreme regard to himself.²⁴

Calvin said, "It becomes us, indeed, to have regard to charity; but we must not offend God for the love of our neighbor."²⁵ Even when writing of Christ's death on the cross, in which most men see first Christ's love for men, Edwards noticed primarily Christ's concern for the honor of God:

The sacrifice of Christ was a sweet savour, because as such it was a great honour done to God's majesty, holiness, and law, and a glorious expression of Christ's respect to that majesty, etc. That when he loved man, and so greatly desired his salvation, he had yet so great respect to that majesty and holiness of God, that he had rather die than that the salvation of man should be any injury or dishonour unto those attributes.²⁶

Edwards insisted that the honor of God was of first importance. His excellencies were held up in such a way before

²⁴ Edwards, "Dissertation on the End for which God Created the World," Works, op. cit. I, 99.

²⁵ Calvin, Institutes, op. cit., II, 88.

²⁶ Edwards, "Remarks on Important Theological Controversies," Works, op. cit., II, 577.

the people that they became acutely conscious of their contrasting sin and of God's justice in forever punishing them. Eventually they came to find a certain delight in the majesty and grace of God, even though they thought themselves to be lost. Edwards then indicated to them that this delight in God was a sign of the new life.

It is not that Edwards placed God's glory and the welfare of men over against each other, as though one were opposed to the other. Instead, he believed that they overlap to such an extent that they become very much the same thing. God's ultimate end in the creation of the world was that his name might be glorified. The salvation of men is also represented in Scripture as a thing that God desires as an ultimate end; that is, something in which he takes pleasure as an end in itself and not as a means to an end. That God's own glory is his ultimate end in the creation was argued at length by Edwards both from reason and from Scripture. God is perfect and good in every respect. It is fitting that he should have a supreme regard to or love for himself. In a man, such a disposition would be selfish, because in the true nature of things one man's desires are not as important as the welfare of a whole group. But the truth is that God is infinitely more worthy than his creatures, and in loving himself he is simply having regard to that which actually is most worthy of his regard.

If God be indeed perfect, then all his plans and objectives will be perfect, and the thing that he designs will be in every respect right and good.

At the same time, Edwards saw in Scripture a clear indication that the "communication of good to the creature" was an ultimate end in the creation of the world. It would be difficult to understand anything from the great gospel promises but that Christ did what he did for us because he loved us. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "In this was manifested the love of God toward us . . ." (I John 4:9). If this which is spoken of as love toward us is actually only a means to a further end, then the real love is bestowed not upon us but upon the final end. God delights, however, in loving us, and when he seeks our good he does so because he desires our well-being as a thing which in itself brings him pleasure. "The Scripture every where represents it, as though the great things Christ did and suffered, were in the most direct and proper sense from exceeding love to us. Thus the apostle Paul represents the matter, Gal. 2:20, 'Who loved me, and gave himself for me.'"²⁷

²⁷ Edwards, "Dissertation on the End for which God Created the World," Works, op. cit., I, 114.

The two "ends," apparently different, are in reality one; because God, in communicating good to his creatures, brings glory to himself at the same time. In the creation, God aimed at making an outward manifestation of the inward glory that was always his. In bestowing salvation upon his creatures and enabling them to know, appreciate, and love him and to participate in his fulness, he gives expression to his own glorious attributes. Edwards illustrated this by reference to John 12:27, in which Christ says, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Christ takes comfort in God the Father's answer, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again," as though that would be the accomplishment of all that he came to do. At the same time, he throws light upon what glorifying God's name was to involve when he says to those standing by, "This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." It seemed to Edwards that Christ's glory and the glory of his Father, which was the glory set before him for which he endured the cross, consisted especially in the expression, exercise, or manifestation of divine grace for the salvation and happiness of the redeemed. Thus, in accomplishing the

redemption, in which he brought both salvation to men and glory to God, Christ saw the travail of his soul and was satisfied.

The glory of God and the creature's good are so related that each implies the other:

If we were capable of more perfect views of God and divine things, which are so much above us, it probably would appear very clear, that . . . these things, instead of appearing entirely distinct, are implied one in the other. God in seeking his glory, seeks the good of his creatures; because the emanation of his glory (which he seeks and delights in, as he delights in himself and his own eternal glory) implies the communicated excellence and happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fulness for them, he does it for himself; because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing, but the emanation and expression of God's glory.²⁸

If God's ultimate end is his "internal glory or fulness existing in its emanation," then even though in seeking this end he seeks the creatures' good, one can see in his purpose a supreme regard to himself.

Its Relationship to the Salvation of Men

The doctrine of God's sovereignty is most difficult where it touches the subject of evangelism; that is, the salvation of some men while others are lost. From Edwards' viewpoint, however, God's sovereignty appears most excellent as it is exercised over the souls of men, for this reason:

²⁸ Ibid., p. 105.



a prince's sovereignty is especially impressive if noblemen, and persons of great worth and influence, are under his dominion. His power appears not so much in his control over average persons as in his authority over men of importance and power. God's sovereignty is exercised over all his creatures, even the highest of them, man. It extends to that which is most important about him, his eternal soul. It appears most glorious as it is exercised over that which concerns him most, his eternal salvation. God's sovereignty was defined as "his absolute, independent right of disposing of all creatures according to his own pleasure."²⁹ By "according to his own pleasure" was meant that God acts without being under any constraint, or subject to the will of any other, or under any obligation. He is not bound in any way (except as he has seen fit to bind himself by his promises) but is at full liberty to dispose of his creatures as he wills.

With reference to the salvation of men, this doctrine implied to Edwards that God can "either bestow salvation on any of the children of men, or refuse it, without any prejudice to the glory of his attributes, except where he has been pleased to declare, that he will or will not

²⁹ Edwards, "Seventeen Occasional Sermons," Works, op. cit., II, 850.

bestow it."³⁰ When man first fell, it must have appeared to the angels in heaven, reasoned Edwards, that God could not possibly pardon him without diminishing God's own holiness and justice. But in the wisdom of God, a way was found whereby even the worst of sinners might be saved without bringing the least reproach upon any of God's attributes. He may save any person whatever without diminishing his holiness, because Christ's death has amply demonstrated God's disposition against sin. If the wicked man himself should be cast into hell and suffer there for ever and ever, that punishment would not demonstrate God's abhorrence of evil any more clearly than did the sufferings of Christ when he died for sin.

God can, therefore, save even the worst of sinners without in any way condoning his wickedness, because the wrath of God against sin has been fully manifested. He may save any person without diminishing the glory of his majesty, because, although men have affronted God, and cast contempt upon his authority, a Mediator has suffered for their offense, and so repaired the injury done to his majesty. He can save any sinner without forfeiting his justice, because, in the sufferings of Christ, sin has been fully punished and justice answered.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 850.

It is not the part of a judge to show favor to the offender, but to administer strict justice. He does not show mercy as a judge but as a sovereign. When the sovereign God in his mercy sought the salvation of sinners, the problem was how to bring full mercy and absolute justice together without compromising either. This was accomplished when Christ, acting on behalf of the sinner, bore the full penalty of his misdeeds.

Justice cannot require any more for any man's sins, than those sufferings of one of the persons in the Trinity, which Christ suffered. Rom. 3:25, 26. 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; to declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Christ.'³¹

Neither does the salvation of any sinner whatsoever cast a shadow upon God's truth. He has said that sin is to be punished with death--which is to be understood as including the second death as well as the first--yet he can pardon the sinner without making this threat void, because Christ, in dying for sin, acted as our surety and so was legally one person with the sinner and bore the threatened punishment.

On this last point, Edwards anticipated the objection that when God said, "If thou eatest, thou shalt die," he meant that the same person who ate should die. To this objection he answered that Adam probably understood that

³¹ Ibid., p. 851.

his descendants were included and that if they sinned in their surety, the curse would fall upon them. In the same way, Christ acts as the surety of those who are his and makes them the heirs of eternal life.

On the other hand, God may refuse salvation to any sinner whatsoever without diminishing the glory of any of his attributes.

There is no person whatever in a natural condition, upon whom God may not refuse to bestow salvation without prejudice to any part of his glory. Let a natural person be wise or unwise, of a good or ill natural temper, of mean or honourable parentage, whether born of wicked or godly parents; let him be a moral or immoral person, whatever good he may have done, however religious he has been, how many prayers soever he has made, and whatever pains he has taken that he may be saved; whatever concern and distress he may have for fear he shall be damned; or whatever circumstances he may be in; God can deny him salvation without the least disparagement to any of his perfections. His glory will not in any instance be the least obscured by it.³²

It would not be against God's righteousness to deny salvation to any unconverted person, because all have deserved hell, and it is not unrighteous for a judge to give to any man what he deserves. Neither has any natural man done anything to remove his liability or to bring God under obligation to him. To deny salvation would not be against God's goodness or mercy, because, if it would be just for God to deny salvation, it would also be consistent with his

³² Ibid., p. 851.

mercy, as what is not contrary to his justice is not contrary to his mercy. "If damnation be justice, then mercy may choose its own object."³³ Neither would it destroy his faithfulness, because God has bound himself by no promises to the natural man. By a "natural" man, Edwards meant one who has not received the forgiveness of sins and become a child of God in Christ.

These arguments may appear to be irrelevant, as they apply specifically to the "natural" or "unconverted" man, whereas one might suppose that any man could turn to Christ and be born of the Spirit and remove himself completely from the category of those to whom God has made no promises and from whom he can justly withhold salvation. Edwards replied, however, that no man can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, and the Father is completely at liberty in choosing whom he will draw.

It is important to remember that Edwards' whole position in this matter was based upon the conviction that all men are sinners in God's sight and deserve damnation. God chooses some of them to eternal life; but he would be perfectly just if he chose none of them, as all men are in their natural condition enemies of God. When he shows mercy to some of them, he does so because of his goodness

³³ Ibid.

and not because he is obliged to do so:

If God is pleased to show mercy to his haters, it is certainly fit that he should do it in a sovereign way, without acting as any way obliged. God will show mercy to his mortal enemies; but then he will not be bound, he will have his liberty to choose the objects of his mercy; to show mercy to what enemy he pleases, and to punish and destroy which of his haters he pleases. And certainly this is a fit and reasonable thing. It is fit that God should distribute saving blessings in this way, and in no other, viz. in a sovereign and arbitrary way. And that ever any body thought of or devised any other way for God to show mercy, than to have mercy on whom he will have mercy, must arise from ignorance of their own hearts, whereby they were in-sensible what enemies they naturally are to God.³⁴

Is God bound to set his love upon his enemies?

Is he obliged to hear the prayers and respect the devotions of those who are in actuality opposed to his will? Of what good are the best gestures when they come from one who is in his heart an enemy? They are like the approach of Joab to Amasa, when he kissed him, and said, "Art thou in health, my brother?"--and smote him at the same time under the fifth rib, and killed him. "Is God obliged to give heaven for the prayers of an enemy?" Edwards put the matter in this light and answered his own questions by saying that God is not bound in any way but is entirely sovereign.

Not only does God occupy the position of a sovereign, but he acts in a sovereign way. He actually exercises his

³⁴ Edwards, "Miscellaneous Discourses," Works, op. cit., II, 140.

sovereignty in the matter of men's salvation. Edwards noted an example of this in the choosing of the Hebrews out of all the other peoples. It was not that they were more numerous than the Egyptians or Persians or more righteous than the Greeks and Romans. He cited Deuteronomy 9:6, "Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people." Rather, it was because he loved them (which Edwards derived from Deuteronomy 7:8).³⁵

He found further evidence for this doctrine in the fact that, while all men need salvation alike, and all are alike unworthy of it, God gives much greater advantages to some than to others. Some are born in heathen lands, while others grow up under a powerful gospel ministry. Looking at it from another angle, Edwards observed that God sometimes bestows salvation upon those who have had but few advantages and in whose circumstances the means of grace would appear very weak, at the same time passing by some who have grown up under great advantages. In the case of those who seek salvation, some who have been seeking for only a short time are converted, while others may seem to seek long and with great strivings and yet not obtain.

³⁵ Edwards, "Seventeen Occasional Sermons," Works, op. cit., II, 852.

Its Relationship to Human Responsibility

There is another way of approaching the problem of why some obtain salvation while others do not, which should be balanced against Edwards' approach from the doctrine of God's sovereignty. The gospel call is unmistakably, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The promise is, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7), with the qualification that the seeking must be utterly sincere. "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Both lines of thought are taught in Scripture and should be continually balanced one with the other, even though a rational reconciliation of them is difficult. In justice to Edwards' consistency, however, it should be recognized that the question in his mind was why some men find it in their heart to seek sincerely while others do not. His answer was a Sovereign God.

Divine sovereignty did not mean to Edwards, however, that men are not responsible to God for their actions:

For, however far we suppose man may be from being capable of properly frustrating his Creator, yet he is capable of showing that his will is contrary to his Creator's ends. He may oppose his Creator in his

will; he may dislike God's ends, and seek others.³⁶

In preaching from Romans 9:18, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth," Edwards cautioned:

When God is here spoken of as hardening some of the children of men, it is not to be understood that God by any positive efficiency hardens any man's heart. There is no positive act in God, as though he put forth any power to harden the heart. To suppose any such thing would be to make God the immediate author of sin. God is said to harden men in two ways: by withholding the powerful influences of his Spirit, without which their hearts will remain hardened, and grow harder and harder; in this sense he hardens them, as he leaves them to hardness. And again by ordering those things in his providence which, through the abuse of their corruption, become the occasion of their hardening. So the apostle said, that he was unto some "a savour of death unto death."³⁷

There is a rational difficulty in accepting both God's sovereignty and man's moral responsibility because the question persists, "Why is man blamed for doing what he cannot avoid doing?" Edwards attempted to solve the dilemma in his famous treatise, "A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of Will." In this treatise he admitted that men freely choose what they want to choose but denied that they can control the motives that determine their desires. In this way he

³⁶ Edwards, "Remarks on Important Theological Controversies," Works, op. cit., II, 512.

³⁷ Edwards, "Seventeen Occasional Sermons," Works, op. cit., II, 849.

removed the question from the level of the will to the level of the motives so that rather than asking, "Why does man choose as he does?" it asks, "Why does man want to make the choices that he makes?" Some would say that his choice today is determined by a choice that he made yesterday, making the free choice of yesterday the motive behind another free choice today. Edwards objected that, logically, such reasoning would lead back ultimately to a first choice based upon no motive at all which would be an absurdity, because without some motive it would be impossible for one to make a choice.

In this treatise he also insisted that the doctrine of divine sovereignty does not present any greater difficulty than does the doctrine of divine foreknowledge; because if God knew that something would take place, it would be the same thing as determining that it should take place, because he could not know certainly that a thing would happen and at the same time know that it might not happen. His solution was that, while God governs supremely by controlling the circumstances and influences that make a man's motives what they are, the responsibility is nevertheless man's, because he exercises liberty in choosing whatever he desires. Francis A. Christie, in the Dictionary of American Biography, has given a concise statement of Edwards' argument:

There is freedom, for the mind can freely act out its choice. The origination of the choice is nevertheless absolutely determined. It is determined by the motive--that which has the greatest tendency to excite volition by being seen as the greatest apparent good. Man has the natural power to serve God, if he is so inclined; but he will not be so inclined unless God reveals himself as the man's highest good--a revelation which is not for all. Moral responsibility lies in the choice, whatever be its origin, not in the cause of the choice. Necessitation cancels no liberty or moral responsibility. Liberty means only that a man can do what he wills; but, as appears from the fact of divine foreknowledge, volitions are determined. God's foreknowledge, which is evidenced by the fulfilment of prophecies, means the certainty of events, and only the will of God establishes their certainty. Adam's fall was a choice caused by motives. In the last analysis the motives were due to God. God wills the system under which sin infallibly comes to pass. The system is God's. The sin is man's.³⁸

Thus Edwards could say, "Let the decrees of God be what they will, that alters not the case as to your liberty, any more than if God had only foreknown."³⁹

Edwards' doctrine differed from Calvinism in all immediately connected with moral agency.⁴⁰ Calvinism has traditionally held that while the will is enslaved as regards religious obedience, so that it cannot of itself choose any saving good, it is free outside of this province, in all civil and secular affairs. In this wide domain

³⁸ Francis A. Christie, "Jonathan Edwards," Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), VI, 36.

³⁹ Edwards, "Five Discourses on the Soul's Eternal Salvation," Works, op. cit., I, 679.

⁴⁰ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, ccxxix.

the power of contrary choice still subsists. This was the philosophy of Augustine, Calvin, and the Westminster divines. They "held to a mutability of will once belonging to man but now lost; to a freedom pertaining at present to men in one sphere of action, but not in another."⁴¹ Edwards' conception of the will, however, admits no such distinction. All choices are determined by motives, and the motivation, ultimately, is not contingent.

J. K. S. Reid notes an inconsistency in traditional Calvinism, in finding the ground of election and reprobation in God but the ground of the consequence of reprobation; namely damnation, in the sinner himself.⁴² He maintains that if Christ were given his rightful place in predestination the whole work of election, not just its application, would be of grace: and, therefore, all men would be elect. Men obviously have, however, the ability to reject Christ, which Reid admits is very difficult to reconcile with all being elect. The reef of difficulty is evil, which all systems of thought encounter and which none, he says, can really negotiate. His solution is to "shift the pressure of the difficulty to a more tolerable point than in the

⁴¹ George P. Fisher, Discussions in History and Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), p. 238.

⁴² Reid, op. cit., p. 181.

Reformers' doctrine," and to "invoke the Augustinian 'O homo, tu quis es?' at a different and more bearable point," so as to permit a certain indeterminism which leaves to men the possibility of finally rejecting Christ.⁴³

The treatise of Edwards is not entirely satisfactory as a solution to the problem of sovereignty and responsibility, because one might still ask, "If God made man and his circumstances in such a way that sin would infallibly result, why is not God responsible for the sin, even though it came about through man's choosing what seemed best to him?" If one grants, however, that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are both taught in Scripture, this may be looked upon as an heroic attempt at reconciliation. His reasoning, when followed through from step to step in the long dissertation, develops a cumulative force that is hard to refute. Edwards did not solve the problem. He did remove the difficulties from the will to the motives governing the will, leaving man responsible for his acts even though God had absolutely determined the motives. His reasoning pushed the paradox to a deeper level, but did not remove it.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 183.

IV. THE DOCTRINE IN EDWARDS' EVANGELISTIC APPEAL

Having observed the doctrine of God's sovereignty as Edwards inherited it, as he experienced it, and as he understood it, one comes finally to his use of it in its practical application to evangelistic preaching. His was certainly a thorough-going doctrine, extending not merely over things, but over the souls of men, even to the determining of their eternal destinies. Wrongly applied, it could lead to the worst kind of fatalism. As Edwards applied it, it led to the very opposite of fatalism and made men almost unbearably conscious of their responsibility toward God.

The Worthiness of God to be Sovereign

It is one thing to insist that men debase themselves before a god whom they believe to be faulty and unworthy of their submission. Such preaching could only produce the attitude of the servant who said, "I know thee that thou art an hard man, . . ." (Matt. 25:24). It would be quite another thing if one could so present God to a congregation that they would look upon him as entirely worthy of all their devotion and as one to whom complete submission would not be a debasement but a privilege. This is what Edwards endeavored to do.

In a sermon on the text, Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God," he declared:

Our submission is to be such as becomes rational creatures. God doth not require us to submit contrary to reason, but to submit as seeing the reason and ground of submission.--Hence, the bare consideration that God is God, may well be sufficient to still all objections and opposition against the divine sovereign dispensations.⁴⁴

In that God is God, he is infinitely perfect, and it is impossible that he should do anything amiss. There can be no objection against his way, because it is always right and good. In that he is God, he is so great that he is infinitely above all comprehension, so that it is unreasonable for anyone to object to his administration because it is mysterious.

What are we; and what do we make of ourselves, when we expect that God and his ways should be upon a level with our understandings? We are infinitely unequal to any such thing, as comprehending God. We may less unreasonably expect that a nut-shell should contain the ocean: Job 11:7, etc. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"⁴⁵

How reasonable it was that the apostle should ask, in Romans 9:20, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" It is more becoming in men to cry out in humble adoration, "O the depth of the riches both of the

⁴⁴ Edwards, "Seven Sermons on Important Subjects," Works, op. cit., II, 107.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

wisdom and knowledge of God: how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

The reason why men should submit to God and raise no objection against his sovereignty is that he is worthy to be sovereign over all things.

God is possessed of such perfections and excellencies as to qualify him to be the absolute sovereign of the world.--Certainly it is more fit that all things be under the guidance of a perfect unerring wisdom, than that they should be left to themselves to fall in confusion, or be brought to pass by blind causes. Yea, it is not fit that any affairs within the government of God should be left without the direction of his wise providence; least of all, things of the greatest importance.⁴⁶

This was Edwards' approach to the doctrine of God's sovereignty and, indeed, his approach to evangelism. He called upon men to humble themselves before God who is abundantly worthy of all their trust and adoration. He sought to introduce men to God in such a way that they would worship him not so much for the sake of what he could do for them as for his own sake, because of his infinite worthiness.

The Proper Response to His Sovereignty

More specifically, in applying the doctrine in his revival sermons, he avoided the deadening questions that so often attend the doctrine. He pressed the doctrine home with all his might:

⁴⁶ Ibid.

God insists, that his sovereignty be acknowledged by us, and that even in this great matter, a matter which so nearly and infinitely concerns us, as our own eternal salvation. This is the stumbling-block on which thousands fall and perish; and if we go on contending with God about his sovereignty, it will be our eternal ruin. It is absolutely necessary that we should submit to God, as our absolute sovereign, and the sovereign over our souls; as one who may have mercy, on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, his hearers were not allowed to indulge in the fatalistic rationalizations that would relieve them of their sense of responsibility. His sermons did not end with tentative observations on how God could be sovereign over the souls of men and men yet be responsible to God for their misdeeds. If the fruitless questions arose at all, they were driven to the back of his hearers' minds by the immediate, practical demand that was made upon them. The following words, taken from the conclusion of one of his sermons, illustrate well how he applied the doctrine:

We may make use of this doctrine to guard those who seek salvation from two opposite extremes--presumption and discouragement. Do not presume upon the mercy of God, and so encourage yourself in sin. Many hear that God's mercy is infinite, and therefore think, that if they delay seeking salvation for the present, and seek it hereafter, that God will bestow his grace upon them. But consider, that though God's grace is sufficient, yet he is sovereign, and will use his own pleasure whether he will save you or not. If you put off salvation till hereafter, salvation will not be in your power. It will be as a sovereign God pleases, whether you shall obtain it or not. Seeing,

⁴⁷ Edwards, "Seventeen Occasional Sermons," Works, op. cit., II, 854.

therefore, that in this affair you are so absolutely dependent on God, it is best to follow his direction in seeking it, which is to hear his voice to-day: "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." Beware also of discouragement. Take heed of despairing thoughts, because you are a great sinner, because you have persevered so long in sin, have backslidden, and resisted the Holy Ghost. Remember that, let your case be what it may, and you ever so great a sinner, if you have not committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, God can bestow mercy upon you without the least prejudice to the honour of his holiness, which you have offended, or to the honour of his majesty, which you have insulted, or of his justice, which you have made your enemy, or of his truth, or of any of his attributes. Let you be what sinner you may, God can, if he pleases, greatly glorify himself in your salvation.⁴⁸

There is a world of difference between the attitude that suggests, "God is sovereign; therefore, what is to be will be," and that which says, "God is sovereign; therefore, I should do what he tells me to do." The first would be fatalistic; the latter could be tremendously dynamic.

There are difficulties attending the doctrine of God's sovereignty. When all is said and done, one cannot help feeling that it puts a great strain upon the doctrine of man's responsibility. For this reason many people feel that they must choose between the doctrines, accepting one and rejecting the other. When it comes to deciding which one to accept, however, a problem arises, because both seem to appear with equal clarity in the Scriptures.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Edwards considered the most logical position to be that which accepts both as the teaching of Scripture and then proceeds to reconcile them as best one can. The above was Edwards' attempt.

The important thing to remember, from the standpoint of his evangelism, is that his doctrine of divine sovereignty did not prevent him from preaching and insisting upon man's moral responsibility to God. His preaching brought men to look with admiring awe upon the majestic sovereignty of God and caused them to feel acutely their responsibility to the Sovereign.

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CHAPTER III

THE GLORY OF THE SAVED AND THE PLIGHT OF THE LOST

Jonathan Edwards preached for a verdict. Those who listened to him were constrained to make decisions. A great many factors entered into this quality of his preaching. His use of logic and his systematic presentation of material lent themselves to strong and convincing arguments. This chapter, however, goes beneath his tools and techniques to two more of the theological concepts that motivated his evangelistic preaching. His zeal for the glory of God has already been discussed. Attention is now directed to his concern for men, particularly his concept of their divergent spiritual conditions and destinies.

In the mind of Edwards there was a sharp contrast between the "saved" and the "lost" both in their present condition and in the eternal future which awaited them. Acutely conscious of this difference, he used every means at his disposal to secure the "conversion" of those to whom he preached. The terms, of course, require defining. A teen-aged Brazilian girl, attending a church conference in the United States, heard a group returning from an evening session say "Five people were saved tonight." Leaping up

excitedly, the Brazilian girl cried, "Saved from what? Was someone in danger?"

I. THE DOCTRINES IN HISTORY

There has always been, in the history of religion, a realization that something is wrong with man and that he needs to be saved. "The concept of salvation is found in all religions. That something is seriously unsatisfactory with man, that he needs to be otherwise than as he is, is taken for granted by all religions."¹ Christian thought has always held that the trouble with man is sin. Certain groups, for example the Gnostics and Christian Scientists, have located sin in the intellect and have interpreted salvation as a matter of enlightenment. Others have looked upon sin as weakness, finiteness, requiring a pantheistic merging with the infinite in order to salvation. The historic Christian view from the time of St. Paul, indeed from the time of the Old Testament, is that sin is a corruption of the nature of man, placing him in rebellion against God. Salvation is a restoration of man to his true place in fellowship with God, an admission into final and indissoluble union with God.

¹ Kenneth J. Foreman, "Soteriology," Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Lefferts A. Loetscher (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955), II, 1048.

The Traditional Doctrine

Calvinistic thought, as embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith, divides all men into two distinct classes, the "elect" and "the rest of mankind."² It places both their present estates and their final destinies poles apart. The Shorter Catechism lists "assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end" as benefits which believers enjoy in this life, while those remaining in unbelief, having "lost communion with God" by their fall, "are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life. . . ."³

After death, "The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory," while "the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day."⁴ No recognition is made in the Confession or Catechisms of any possibility of a second chance after death.

² The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (revised edition; Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1956), pp. 27-29.

³ The Shorter Catechism, 36, 19.

⁴ The Confession of Faith, op. cit., pp. 170-171.

Variations

It is natural that attempts should be made to introduce a third alternative somewhere between heaven and hell, to offer a second chance after death, or to obliterate the sharp line of distinction between "saved" and "lost" people; for man, apart from the divine revelation, feels himself to be neither worthy of heaven nor deserving of hell.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory attempts to introduce a third alternative, at least a temporary one, between heaven and hell. Calvin vigorously opposed the idea, calling it "a pernicious fiction of Satan," principally upon the grounds that it "makes void the cross of Christ, that it intolerably insults the Divine mercy, and weakens and overturns our faith. For what is their purgatory, but a satisfaction for sins paid after death by the souls of the deceased? . . . But . . . the blood of Christ is the only satisfaction. . . ." ⁵

In Jewish thought before the time of Christ there "seem to have been two Paradises, one in Sheol (perhaps that of Luke 23.43) and one in heaven (perhaps that of II Cor.

⁵ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, n.d.), I, 736.

12.4)";⁶ but Alan Richardson, in A Theological Word Book of the Bible, insists that "there is no support in the NT for rabbinic speculations (or later Christian ones) about Paradise as a place of purgation where souls are purified from sin and fitted for heaven."⁷

In the past fifty years two ideas that dim the distinction between saved and lost persons have gained considerable attention. First, "there is a growing tendency to disbelieve in death as final, in the sense that it puts an end to further hope of salvation."⁸ P. T. Forsyth, in This Life and the Next, reissued 1948, writes: "There are more conversions on the other side than on this." C. S. Lewis supports the same possibility in The Great Divorce, 1946. Teunis E. Gouwens, a Presbyterian (U. S.) minister, wrote without censure in Can We Repeat the Creed?, 1936, his belief that God never finally shuts a sinner from his presence without any opportunity to accept Christ.⁹

⁶ Alan Richardson, A Theological Word Book of the Bible (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1950), p. 107.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kenneth J. Foreman, "Eschatology," Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, op. cit., I, 392.

⁹ Ibid.

Secondly, there is some tendency to universalism.

N. F. S. Ferre, in The Christian Doctrine of God, 1951, p. 219, calls God the "perfect parent who has no permanent problem children. H. H. Farmer, in God and Men, Chapter VI, gives reasons why, in spite of himself, he leans to universalism. But Emil Brunner, in The Christian Doctrine of God, Chapter 23, gives biblical and logical reasons to the contrary.¹⁰

Classification of Edwards' Doctrine

Being a Calvinist, Edwards fell heir to the traditions of that theology, a theology which draws a clear distinction between the saved and the lost. In a letter to the Rev. Dr. Erskine of Edinburgh, Edwards stated: "As to my subscribing to the substance of the Westminster Confession, there would be no difficulty."¹¹ The peculiarities of his doctrine and the ways in which he applied it are discussed below.

II. THE DOCTRINES IN EDWARDS' CONVICTIONS

Edwards has become so famous--or should one say so infamous?--for one type of sermon--indeed, for one partic-

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ W. D. Killin, The Framework of the Church (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), p. 109.

ular sermon--that most people hold an unfortunately one-sided view of his ministry. It is certainly true that he preached startlingly of the plight of the lost. It is equally true and vitally significant that he preached winningly of the glories of the saved. The alternatives were so real to him and so compellingly important that they drove him to seek the conversion of his hearers. His concern for the souls of men, as well as his zeal for the glory of God, put urgency into his evangelism.

The Glory of the Saved

Edwards' ministry might be compared with a coin possessing a bright side and a dark side and turning first one way and then the other. So considered, it becomes evident that the dark side was presented most often to his congregation, but possible that the bright side also played its part, and believable that the two sides taken together were responsible in large measure for the effectiveness of his ministry.

There was an aspect of Edwards' preaching, not as well known as the denunciatory aspect, in which he stressed the positive benefits of faith in Jesus Christ. It was hopeful and helpful; and if it was prominent in his thinking, it could conceivably add a flavor to his sermons, even to those which dealt with negative themes. His preaching on

the glories of the saved was not primarily eschatological. He lifted before his congregation a glorious hope of the future, but the emphasis was upon the present joy of Christian living.

Present joy. The following pages deal with the present joy of Christian living as Edwards conceived it, as he experienced it, and as he observed it in the lives of others.

Edwards preached that Christians have happiness in this world. This happiness consists mainly in having the image of God upon them.¹² It is not perfect, but it is real. "They have an excellency and glory in them, because they have Christ dwelling in them. . . . Though it be but as a spark, yet it is something ten thousand times more excellent than any ruby, or the most precious pearl that ever was found on the earth."¹³ As to their position, they are children of God. As to their riches, God himself is their portion. There is glory in him to attract them for ever and ever. Christ is theirs. "All his beauty is their portion, and his dying love is theirs, his very heart is theirs, and his glory and happiness in heaven are theirs,

¹² Edwards, "The Portion of the Righteous," Works, op. cit., II, 888.

¹³ Ibid.

so far as their capacity will allow them to partake of it."¹⁴ Deliverance from hell and the hope of eternal life contribute to the happiness of Christians, but according to Edwards that is not all. There is another cause for happiness, less selfish, that focuses attention not upon self but upon God and finds enjoyment in him because of who he is, quite apart from the benefits he is able to bestow.

The joy of a Christian does not consist merely in the sense of his own good estate, as natural men often are ready to imagine; but there is an excellent, transcendent, soul-satisfying sweetness that sometimes fills the soul in the apprehension of the excellency of God. . . . This pleasure is the sweetest pleasure that a Christian ever feels.¹⁵

When a person becomes a Christian, a change takes place within him that causes him to have a desire for the things that are good and that actually bring happiness. There is satisfaction for one who comes to Christ that will deliver him from the restlessness of those who are ever inquiring, "Who will show us any good?" The person who finds Christ finds the one who is the apple tree among the trees of the wood and sits down in his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet unto his taste.¹⁶ An orthodox opinion about Christ is wholly vain unless it is accom-

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 889.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 890.

¹⁶ Edwards, "Peace which Christ Gives," Works, op. cit., II, 91.

panied by an honor, esteem, and "friendship of heart" toward Christ which is the essence of Christianity.¹⁷ Christ is not only a sacrifice for sins, but also the Christian's leader and captain. He leads in righteous living and is an example of the attractiveness of that kind of living. He provides continual encouragement to others to live righteously and reap the happiness, honor, and glory that come to those who so live.¹⁸ It is the privilege of the Christian to participate in the kingdom of God, which is not of this world but which is in the hearts of men and manifests itself in righteousness, peace, and joy.¹⁹

The Christian has his heart set upon God. In a sermon on the text, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee," Edwards insisted that the main reason a true Christian wants to go to heaven is because God is there; and even though his experience of God is only partial in this life, he prefers what he already has of God to anything else in this world. The views which are sometimes given him of the beauty and excellency of God are "more precious to him than all the treasures of the

¹⁷ Edwards, "Qualifications for Communion," Works, op. cit., I, 447.

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, Works of President Edwards, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1829-30), II, 143.

¹⁹ Ibid., II, 14.

wicked."²⁰ Whatever happens to a godly man he is happy because God, who does not change, is his portion.

Edwards taught that there is in Christ provision for complete satisfaction of the deep desires of the human soul. Approaching the subject in a way that is characteristic of him, he first proposed that what every person naturally craves is happiness. This is an appetite that can never be changed, overcome, or abated. There are different ideas concerning what happiness is and how it may be achieved, but it is a universal desire. Carrying the argument a step further, he declared that men crave happiness equal to the capacity of their natures. Men in their fallen state are woefully lacking in happiness. They find things to gratify their senses but nothing to feed their souls. Men who are "awakened," to use Edwards' term, begin to recognize their emptiness and realize that it can be satisfied by nothing less than restored fellowship with their Creator. They would not be consoled should the throne to a kingdom be offered to them but long for the pardoning of their sins and to be at peace with God. To such Christ offers the invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." When a person comes to Christ, he finds the satis-

²⁰ Edwards, "God the Best Portion of the Christian," Works, op. cit., II, 105.

faction and happiness for which he has been longing, more or less consciously, all his life.

The excellency of Christ is such, that the discovery of it is exceedingly contenting and satisfying to the soul. The inquiry of the soul is after that which is most excellent. The carnal soul imagines that earthly things are excellent; one thinks riches most excellent, another has the highest esteem of honour, and to another carnal pleasure appears the most excellent; but the soul cannot find contentment in any of these things, because it soon finds an end to their excellency.

Worldly men imagine, that there is true excellency and true happiness in those things which they are pursuing. They think that if they could but obtain them, they should be happy: and when they obtain them, and cannot find happiness, they look for happiness in something else, and are still upon the pursuit.

But Christ Jesus has true excellency, and so great excellency, that when they come to see it they look no further, but the mind rests there. It sees a transcendent glory and an ineffable sweetness in him; it sees that till now it has been pursuing shadows, but that now it has found the substance; that before it had been seeking happiness in the stream, but that now it has found the ocean.

.....

The delight and contentment that is to be found here, passeth understanding, and is unspeakable and full of glory. It is impossible for those who have tasted of this fountain, and know the sweetness of it, ever to forsake it. The soul has found the river of water of life, and it desires no other drink; it has found the tree of life, and it desires no other fruit.²¹

Because of his own excellency, Christ satisfies the soul's desire. Moreover, his love gives the Christian a deep and abiding contentment. This love is satisfying

²¹ Edwards, "Safety, Fulness, and Sweet Refreshment, to be Found in Christ," Works, op. cit., II, 932-3.

because it is the love of an exceedingly excellent person and because it is such a great love as was never before seen upon earth. To be loved by the King of kings and Lord of lords, the one who is the brightness of the Father's glory, is enough to satisfy the soul. His was a love unto death, exceeding every other love that the world has known. Receiving this love brings a constant stream of joy and hope into the soul. Christ is satisfying because he is the way to the Father, to a renewed communion with God, and thus to true happiness and contentment.

Such was Edwards' conception of the joy of Christian living. His description of his own experience of that joy follows. It seems to have been profound and very moving.

I had vehement longings of soul after God and Christ, and after more holiness, wherewith my heart seemed to be full, and ready to break; . . . My mind was greatly fixed on divine things. . . . I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner, at such times, to sing forth my contemplations. I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent. The delights which I now felt in the things of religion, were of an exceedingly different kind from those before mentioned, that I had when a boy; and what then I had no more notion of, than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colours. They were of a more inward, pure soul-animating, and refreshing nature. . . . Pure and humble, holy and heavenly, Christianity appeared exceedingly amiable to me.²²

²² Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lvi. (Italics not in the original).

Christianity appeared exceedingly amiable to him! His accounts of his own intimate thoughts abound in words expressive of sweetness, calmness, and love. "My sense of divine things gradually increased," he wrote, "and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of every thing was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing." His language indicated that the longings of his soul were directed toward God and that they affected his appreciation of the world of nature:

God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity, and love, seemed to appear in every thing. . . . I often used to sit and view the moon for a long time; and in the day, spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things: in the mean time singing forth, with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer.²³

"Sweet glory" is an unusual expression. Why did he not say his brilliant glory? Most men would admire the glory of God and love his gentleness. It is significant that Edwards thought of the glory of God as being "sweet." When he preached the glory of God, his sovereignty, his total claims upon the persons of men, there was something more than the brilliance of polished steel. Could there not have been a glow of warmth and sweetness about those sermons even though they pierced like a sword? The following is

²³ Ibid., I, lv.

evidence that there was such a glow:

I have loved the doctrines of the gospel; they have been to my soul like green pastures. The gospel has seemed to me the richest treasure; the treasure that I have most desired, and longed that it might dwell richly in me.

.....

It has often appeared to me delightful, to be united to Christ; to have him for my Head, and to be a member of his body; also to have Christ for my Teacher and Prophet. I very often think with sweetness, and longings, and pantings of soul, of being a little child, taking hold of Christ, to be led by him through the wilderness of this world. . . cut off entirely from my own root, in order to grow into and out of Christ.

.....

The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced, have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate; but in a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel.

.....

Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception--which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly

purity. I have several other times had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.²⁴

These words, quoted at length because they are vital to an understanding of the spiritual climate in the heart of Edwards, the climate in which his sermons were conceived, are similar to Augustine's great expression of his wonder at the greatness and mysteriousness of God:

What art Thou then, my God: What, but the Lord God? For who is Lord but the Lord? or who is God save our God? Most highest, most good, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful, yet most just; most hidden, yet most present; most beautiful, yet most strong; stable, yet incomprehensible; unchangeable, yet all-changing; never new, never old; all-renewing, and bringing age upon the proud, and they know it not; ever working, ever at rest; still gathering, yet nothing lacking; supporting, filling, and over-spreading; creating, nourishing, and maturing; seeking, yet having all things. Thou lovest, yet grieveest not; art angry, yet serene; changest Thy works, Thy purpose unchanged; receivest again what Thou findest, yet didst never lose; never in need, yet rejoicing in gains; never covetous, yet exacting usury. Thou receivest over and above, that Thou mayest owe; and who hath aught that is not Thine? Thou payest debts, owing nothing; remittest debts, losing nothing. And what have I now said, my God, my life, my holy joy? or what saith any man when he speaks of Thee? Yet woe to him that speaketh not, since mute are even the most eloquent.²⁵

Hearing Augustine express himself to God in this way aids one in understanding the inner workings of his heart; and one is enabled better to understand Edwards when he

²⁴ Ibid., p. lxxxix.

²⁵ St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. E. B. Pusey (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1950), p. 3.

hears him speaking of the "sweet glory of God," and "singing forth, with a low voice," his "contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer."

This, his own experience, was the very fountain of his concept of the glories of the saved.

Another source of information concerning Edwards' doctrine of the present joy of the Christian life is the experiences of others as they were observed, approved, and fostered by Edwards.

He approved, although he did not have to the same extent, experiences such as belonged to his wife. Dwight quotes Edwards as saying that his wife

was led, under an uncommon discovery of God's excellency, and in an high exercise of love to God, and of rest and joy in him, to make a new and most solemn dedication of herself to his service and glory, an entire renunciation of the world, and a resignation of all to God. After this, she had often such views of the glory of the divine perfections, and of Christ's excellencies, and at times, for hours together, without any interruption, that she was overwhelmed, and as it were swallowed up, in the light and joy of the love of God.²⁶

Mrs. Edwards' own description of these religious emotions could in itself justify a detailed study; but it will suffice here to demonstrate that it abounds in expressions of joy and delight.

The following quotations from Mrs. Edwards intimate

²⁶ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, civ.

the qualities of that experience: "The peace and happiness, which I hereupon felt, was altogether inexpressible."²⁷

We remained in the meeting-house about three hours, after the public exercises were over. During most of the time, my bodily strength was overcome; and the joy and thankfulness, which were excited in my mind, as I contemplated the great goodness of God, led me to converse with those who were near me, in a very earnest manner.²⁸

She described how her religious state caused her to think of others:

I never before felt so far from a disposition to judge and censure others, with respect to the state of their hearts, their sincerity, or their attainments in holiness, as I did that morning. To do this, seemed abhorrent to every feeling of my heart. I realized also, in an unusual and very lively manner, how great a part of Christianity lies in the performance of our social and relative duties to one another.²⁹

References to the taking away of her physical strength and to almost uncontrollable desires to arise and praise God remind one uncomfortably of fanatical excesses that prevail today in so-called worship services in which there is no semblance of things being done "decently and in order." The Edwards household, however, was highly educated, and its members were not the type of people to practice excesses.

²⁷ Ibid., p. cv.

²⁸ Ibid., p. cvi.

²⁹ Ibid., p. cix.

Much could be said about religion being an emotional outlet for a people who lived an otherwise unexciting life as contrasted with people today who have many outlets for their energies and do not need to "explode" at religious meetings; but regardless of the wisdom or rightness of the modes of expression, there is abundant evidence that in the religion of Mrs. Edwards there was a great deal of joy. Moreover, she expressed herself as being in sympathy with the evangelistic work that her husband was carrying on at that time in another town. Concerning "Mr. Edwards's success, in making peace and promoting religion at Leicester," she wrote: "The intelligence inspired me with such an admiring sense of the great goodness of God, in using Mr. Edwards as the instrument of doing good, and promoting the work of salvation, that it immediately overcame me, and took away my strength, so that I could no longer stand on my feet."³⁰

David Brainerd, a young missionary to the Indians and greatly admired by Edwards, provides another illustration of the joy of Christian living as observed and appreciated by Edwards. He was not a convert of Edwards but was a dear friend and shared many common viewpoints. Edwards was his counselor during Brainerd's missionary endeavors. Some of

³⁰ Ibid.

Brainerd's early writings tell what he considered to be the distinguishing marks of a true Christian:

1. He has a true knowledge of the glory and excellency of God, that he is most worthy to be loved and praised for his own divine perfections. Psal. cxlv.3. 2. God is his portion, Psal. lxxiii.25. And God's glory his great concern, Matt. vi.22. 3. Holiness is his delight; nothing he so much longs for, as to be holy as God is holy. Phil. iii.9-12. 4. Sin is his greatest enemy. This he hates, for its own nature, for what it is in itself, being contrary to a holy God, Jer. ii.1. And consequently he hates all sin, Rom. vii.24. I John iii.9. 5. The laws of God also are his delight, Psal. cxix.97. Rom. vii.22. These he observes, not out of constraint, from a servile fear of hell; but they are his choice, Psal. cxix.30. The strict observance of them is not his bondage, but his greatest liberty, ver. 45.³¹

Brainerd's remarks fit into the picture of Edwards' concept of the glory of the saved, for they illustrate a type of Christian outlook of which Edwards approved. The fear of hell was certainly prominent in Edwards' evangelistic preaching, but he insisted that a converted person should progress far beyond fear as a motive of service and conduct. He should delight in, that is, enjoy, holy living and derive real pleasure from seeking conformity to the commandments of God.

The note of joy may also be observed in Edwards' converts. During the times of revival, religion was talked everywhere, being the subject of conversation in youth

³¹ Edwards, "Some Signs of Godliness," Works, op. cit., II, 441.

gatherings, at weddings, in homes, and even in places of business; and it was spoken of as something attractive and as a source of happiness. The young people, when they met, were inclined to spend their time in talking of the "excellency and dying love of Jesus Christ, the glory of the way of salvation, the wonderful, free, and sovereign grace of God, his glorious work in the conversion of a soul, the truth and certainty of the great things of God's word, the sweetness of the views of his perfections."³²

A young lady (to give an individual instance), described as coming from an intelligent family, not tending toward "enthusiasm," but having a quiet, reserved personality, was asked by her sister why she smiled. Her reply was, "I am brimfull of a sweet feeling within!" In the space of half a year some three hundred persons at Northampton came to a saving faith in Christ, as nearly as Edwards was able to judge, including persons of all ages and as many males as females. He observed, "Those who were formerly loose young persons, are generally to all appearance, become true lovers of God and Christ, and spiritual in their dispositions."³³

Congregational singing greatly improved at the time

³² Edwards, "A Narrative of Surprising Conversions," Works, op. cit., I, 348.

³³ Ibid., p. 350.

of the revival, the men singing with "unusual elevation of heart and voice," indicating a marked degree of joy in their religion.

Behind the preaching of Edwards lay a conviction, grounded in his own experience, observed in that of others, and confirmed by the teachings of Scripture, that the Christian life is eminently attractive and glorious. In inviting people to accept Christ and in urging the invitation upon them, Edwards had in mind that it would prove a great blessing to them. This was one of the motives that fired his evangelistic zeal, which he defined as the fervor of Christian love. "It is indeed a flame, but a sweet one; or rather it is the heat and fervour of a sweet flame."³⁴ A love for God, a great desire that many should come to know him, and a conviction that it would be good for them, were factors in his evangelism. Christie detected this brighter side of Edwards' evangelism:

The conversion of a child of Satan to a child of God lies in the birth of a love of God originating in the disclosure to the soul of God's moral perfections. . . . It is a direct, intuitive vision of the beauty that is in God and Christ, which by its perfect joy convinces the soul of the reality and certainty of spiritual things. The soul's nature is changed. It shares in the divine light, shares in the character of Christ. Now the affections are brought into beautiful harmony, and new conduct manifests the divinity of the principles

³⁴ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 306.

from which it flows, a union of Christ with faculties of the soul.³⁵

As stated above, Edwards placed more emphasis in his preaching upon the present joy of Christian living than he did upon future reward. Nevertheless, the latter was given some attention.

Future reward. This aspect of the glory of the saved concerns their hope of the world to come. Edwards looked upon heaven as a place, and he supported that view by his characteristic style of reasoning. "It is absurd to suppose that the heaven where the body of Christ is, is not a place. To say that the body of Christ is in no place, is the same thing as to say that he has no body."³⁶ Departed spirits go there immediately upon leaving the body, where they are with Christ, where they have their separate identity, and where they recognize those who were their loved ones upon earth. They dwell there in joyful anticipation of the final resurrection, when they will be reunited with their bodies, which will be resurrected and glorified. The chief joy of Christians in heaven will be that they will see Christ and in him will see God.

³⁵ Francis A. Christie, Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), VI, 34.

³⁶ Edwards, "The Portion of the Righteous," Works, op. cit., II, 892.

He supported his view of heaven with Scripture, interpreting it in such a way as to give vividness and minute detail to the situations pictured in his sermons. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" meant to Edwards that around the bedside of a dying Christian there is a literal guard of angels. Devils, eager to seize upon their prey, are thwarted in their efforts. Upon leaving the body, the soul is escorted by the angels into the presence of Christ, after being conducted through the aerial and starry heavens to the most glorious part of the universe. Quoted in support of this was the account in Luke 16 of the beggar being carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

The bright side of Edwards' preaching has thus been summarized under the headings of present joy and future reward. Attention is now directed to the darker side.

The Plight of the Lost

This phase is discussed under the headings of the present misery and the future punishment of the wicked.

Present misery. The present misery of unbelievers, as Edwards saw it, consisted in original sin and in enmity against God.

The doctrine of original sin, simply stated, means that as a result of the fall every man is born corrupt; and

and it is usually held that he is also guilty. Out of his perverted state proceed his evil acts.³⁷

Historically, the doctrine stems from biblical teaching, especially Paul's statement in Romans 5:12-21, that "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned." The difficulty is that, while a definite connection between Adam's sin and all sin is clearly asserted, it is not easy to determine whether Paul meant that all men sinned in Adam or that all sinned personally, as Adam did.

Augustine connected the whole race so intimately with Adam that all men, sharing in his nature and personality, are corrupt and guilty. Aquinas agreed that original sin meant the loss of righteousness, but insisted that the latter was a super-added grace, so that the loss of it leaves men but little worse than they were when created. Modern liberal Protestantism developed the idea that we have no original corruption and guilt, but only morally neutral tendencies which lead to temptation and sin when confronted by moral law. Neo-orthodox theology accepts the fact of original sin, but does not trace it back to an historic Adam. "There was no historic Adam with whom our inborn sinfulness is connected and yet it is due to some

³⁷ John Newton Thomas, "Original Sin," Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, op. cit., II, 826.

voluntary act prior to our birth. The explanation of original sin is thus a complete mystery, but the fact has been preserved and the findings of science have been faced."³⁸

Luther and Calvin adopted the essentials of the Augustinian view, and conservative Protestantism has continued to hold that men are born corrupt and guilty.

They [our first parents] being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.

From this original corruption, . . . do proceed all actual transgressions.³⁹

Edwards wrote a long treatise in which he expounded his doctrine of original sin and marshalled arguments in support of it. In the preface to the treatise, Edwards told how vital he considered the doctrine to be:

I look on the doctrine as of great importance; which every body will doubtless own it is, if it be true. For, if the case be such indeed, that all mankind are by nature in a state of total ruin, both with respect to the moral evil of which they are the subjects, and the afflictive evil to which they are exposed, the one as the consequence and punishment of the other; then, doubtless, the great salvation by Christ stands in direct relation to this ruin, as the remedy to the disease; and the whole gospel, or doctrine of salvation must suppose it; and all real belief, or true notion of that gospel, must be built upon it.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., p. 827.

³⁹ The Westminster Confession of Faith, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴⁰ Edwards, "The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended," Works, op. cit., I, 145.

Some of Edwards' contemporaries departed from the doctrine, following the line of thought advanced by two Norwich writers, a Dr. Turnbull and a Dr. Taylor. The latter had published two books, The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination, and Key to the Apostolic Writings, in which he opposed the traditional doctrine of original sin, insisting that the passage from Romans mentioned above as the locus classicus of original sin referred simply to physical death and that all Paul meant when he said "through one man sin entered" is that Adam "began transgression." That is, he happened to be the first to sin.

To this Edwards replied that death in some parts of the passage, such as Romans 6:23, obviously means eternal death, and that the emphasis upon sin and death entering by one man is such that the passage needs to be understood as establishing a definite relationship between the sin of Adam and the corruption of the race.

I think, it would go far towards directing us to the more clear conception and right statement of this affair, were we steadily to bear this in mind: that God, in every step of his proceeding with Adam, in relation to the covenant or constitution established with him, looked on his posterity as being one with him. And though he dealt more immediately with Adam, it yet was as the head of the whole body, and the root of the whole tree; and in his proceedings with him, he dealt with all the branches, as if they had been then existing in their root.

From which it will follow, that both guilt, or

exposedness to punishment, and also depravity of heart, came upon Adam's posterity just as they came upon him, as much as if he and they had all co-existed, like a tree with many branches.⁴¹

The significance of the above is that Edwards looked upon all men as being sinful and guilty by nature, therefore needing to be evangelized.

A sense of the dreadfulness of sin was a personal concern to Edwards. The warnings which he urged upon others he first took to himself:

My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable. . . . When I look into my heart, and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss, infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me, that were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fulness and glory of the great Jehovah, and the arm of his power and grace stretched forth in all the majesty of his power, and in all the glory of his sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself; far beyond the sight of every thing, but the eye of sovereign grace, that can pierce even down to such a depth. And yet, it seems to me that my conviction of sin is exceedingly small and faint. . . . I have greatly longed of late for a broken heart, and to lie low before God.⁴²

He experienced the deep sense of sin and utter dependence upon the grace of God to which he sought to lead his congregation. This distinguishes him from evangelists who preach dramatic warnings with a seeming lightness and apparent lack of any deep or personal appreciation of what they mean.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 220.

⁴² Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, xc.

The members of his own family were subjects of warnings similar in kind to those directed to his congregation. In the home of Edwards the lostness of all persons, apart from Christ, was not only an accepted but a very vivid idea. Dwight says that Mrs. Edwards prayed earnestly for her children even before they were born, and that "the prospect of her becoming the mother of a rational immortal creature, which came into existence in an undone and infinitely dreadful state, was sufficient to lead her to bow before God daily, for his blessing on it--even redemption and eternal life by Christ Jesus."⁴³

In April of 1753 Edwards addressed the following to his oldest son, Timothy:

My dear Child,

Before you will receive this letter, the matter will doubtless be determined, as to your having the small-pox. You will either be sick with that distemper, or will be past danger of having it, from any infection taken in your voyage. But whether you are sick or well, like to die or like to live, I hope you are earnestly seeking your salvation. I am sure there is a great deal of reason it should be so, considering the warnings you have had in word and in providence. . . . But this providence remarkably teaches you the need of a better Friend, and a better Parent, than earthly parents are; one who is every where present, and all-sufficient, that cannot be kept off by infectious distempers, who is able to save from death or to make happy in death, to save from eternal misery, and to bestow eternal life. . . . But, if I hear that you have escaped,--either that you have not been sick, or are restored,--

⁴³ Ibid., p. lxxxvii.

though I shall rejoice, and have great cause of thankfulness, yet I shall be concerned for you. If your escape should be followed with carelessness and security, and forgetting the remarkable warning you have had, and God's great mercy in your deliverance, it would in some respects be more awful than sore sickness. It would be very provoking to God, and would probably issue in an increasing hardness of heart; and, it may be, divine vengeance may soon overtake you.⁴⁴

Warnings were not reserved for the pulpit, but were a part of the regular family diet.

The plight of the lost is rooted in original sin. We are not condemned for another's evil choice, says George P. Fisher, but for our own; but the principle of sin within us is only the natural consequence of that original act. The first rising of evil inclination in us is one and the same with the first rising of evil inclination in Adam.⁴⁵ Edwards went further, saying that original sin includes both depravity of nature and the imputation of Adam's first sin, an imputation which makes us liable to or exposed to participation in the punishment that that sin deserves.

The plight of the lost stems also from the fact that they are enemies of God. The enmity of natural men toward God shows itself in their distaste for God and failure duly to appreciate his marvelous attributes, in the setting up

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. cxcviii-cxcix.

⁴⁵ George P. Fisher, Discussions in History and Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), p. 240.

of their wills against God's will, and in their actual aversion to God--the kind of aversion that prompted men to crucify Christ, and which is present at least as a seed in every unregenerate person.

God, though the Creator of all things, yet has some enemies in the world.--Men in general will own, that they are sinners. There are few, if any, whose consciences are so blinded as not to be sensible they have been guilty of sin. And most sinners will own that they have bad hearts. They will own that they do not love God so much as they should do; that they are not so thankful as they ought to be for mercies; and that in many things they fail. And yet few of them are sensible that they are God's enemies. They do not see how they can be truly so called; for they are not sensible that they wish God any hurt, or endeavour to do him any.

But we see that the Scripture speaks of them as enemies to God.⁴⁶

If it were in the power of sinful men to dethrone God and do him actual harm, said Edwards, they would do so. The feeling of resentment and hatred is furthered by the fact that they know God is opposed to their wickedness. If it were not for the restraining grace of God, the wickedness of men would surpass all measure. Natural men will not come to Christ. Men do not come to Christ, because they do not want to come. There are some things they like about Christ, and others they do not like. They want to be delivered from hell, but to come to Christ would mean parting with their sins and their own self-righteousness

⁴⁶ Edwards, "Men Naturally Are God's Enemies," Works, op. cit., II, 140.

and accepting Christ as he is, as he is offered to them in the gospel--not the Christ of their own desire, but the Christ of God. This they are not willing to do.

When we say that natural men are not willing to come to Christ, it is not meant that they are not willing to be delivered from hell; for without doubt, no natural man is willing to go to hell. Nor is it meant, that they are not willing that Christ should keep them from going to hell. Without doubt, natural men under awakenings often greatly desire this. But this does not argue that they are willing to come ~~to come~~ to Christ: for, notwithstanding their desire to be delivered from hell, their hearts do not close with Christ, . . . They had rather, for the present, run the venture of going to hell, than do that.⁴⁷

To persist in enmity to God a little longer, Edwards urged, will create a mutual enmity between sinners and God for all eternity. What will sinners do then, when God in all his power shall come against them as an enemy? Will they be able to keep up their spirits when God approaches as an enemy just as they have been God's enemies, without any love or pity?

As enemies, sinners have no valid claim upon God. God may hear their prayers, but he is not required to do so. "If God is pleased to show mercy to his haters, it is certainly fit that he should do it in a sovereign way, without acting as any way obliged."⁴⁸ God will show mercy

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

to enemies, but he is not obligated to do so. He would be perfectly justified in rejecting all of them; and if he pleases to show mercy, he is certainly justified in doing so in a sovereign way. It is unreasonable for men to believe that by praying, or reading, or making a show of friendship toward one whom they hate in their hearts, they can bring that one into obligation to them. Does not God know the hatred that is in men's hearts? Is he obliged to hear the prayers of an enemy?

Edwards recognized the tendency of men to say, "I do not know, I am not sensible, that I hate God, and have a mortal enmity against him. I feel no such thing in myself, and if I have such enmity, why do not I feel it?"⁴⁹ Addressing himself to that tendency, he argued that an examination of their low estimate of God, their preferring other things to his love, their disrespect for his authority, and their aversion to him and to his will, should show them that they are enemies. Furthermore, "Man has naturally a principle of atheism in him; an indisposition to realize God's being, and a disposition to doubt of it,"⁵⁰ which mitigates his hatred. Or, failing to recognize that God is such a god as he is, hating sin and by no means clearing the guilty,

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 134.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

a man creates for himself a god more to his liking, which naturally he does not hate as he would the true God. Other considerations are that God is infinitely above, and out of the reach of the sinner, and that man is restrained by fear from a full acknowledgment of his hatred. By such propositions the evangelist sought to destroy complacency and bring men to a serious consideration of the gospel.

Words such as these were startling to New Englanders who had been accustomed to the half-way covenant and who had heard enough of the rising Arminian doctrine to lead them to believe that they could make their way to heaven by diligent effort, and that the effort could be postponed temporarily and taken up when their inclinations so indicated.⁵¹ Not only had Arminianism tempered the minds of New Englanders, but the Calvinism that prevailed had degenerated. Winslow writes:

New England dissent through its own spokesmen, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, John Davenport, and Peter Bulkeley, had modified Calvinistic doctrine . . . in the direction of a reasonable rather than an arbitrary God, until by 1731 a theological system with a strongly legalistic bias had been developed. The "covenant of grace" amounted in effect to a contract, almost as binding on God as on man.⁵²

⁵¹ Vergilius Ferm, Puritan Sage, Collected Writings of Jonathan Edwards (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), p. xviii.

⁵² Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 155.

By the process of rationalization, the "unfathomable, unpredictable God of Calvin had been gradually changed into a reasonable being."⁵³

Edwards' preaching was a strong assertion of the absolute sovereignty of God and of the utter folly of being his enemy. It placed the issue so squarely before the Northampton congregation that they could no longer be complacent. Insistence upon God's sovereignty, not only in a general sense, but in a particular sense, over them, and even over their very salvation, gave rise to an uneasiness that dispelled the feeling of security and made people conscious of what a terrible thing it would be to have a sovereign God arrayed against them. The imagination was stimulated, and the plight of the enemies of God became to them a frightening concept. No longer were the doctrines of religion something about which to think casually on Sundays and to pick over and select what seemed desirable to incorporate into daily living. They became life and death matters, not distantly removed, but immediately present.

That which has been said about Edwards' conception of the present misery of the lost, consisting in their original sin and their enmity against God, leads to the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 154.

next logical consideration, his conception of future punishment, or the consequences of the sin and enmity.

Future punishment. The final abode of the lost is hell, conceived by Edwards as being actual, imminent, and eternal.

The judgment is not something about which to speculate in a detached way but a coming reality toward which true Christians should look with utmost expectancy and for which the ungodly must speedily prepare. When judgment comes, it will be thorough and irresistible. From Ezekiel's words (22:14), "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it," Edwards drew the doctrine: "Since God hath undertaken to deal with impenitent sinners, they shall neither shun the threatened misery, nor deliver themselves out of it, nor can they bear it."

Many ministers have attempted to deal with the ungodly by representing to them what the Word of God says concerning them, but the ungodly are always doubting the truth of the Scriptures, questioning whether they be the word of God, and whether the threatenings of Scripture be true.⁵⁴ But God has undertaken to convince them that the threaten-

⁵⁴ Edwards, "The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable," Works, op. cit., II, 78.

ings are true, and they will be convinced by dear experience. In this world they hear how dreadful hell is, but in the next they will experience it.

They cannot think that they shall to all eternity suffer such exquisite and horrible torments. But they shall be taught and convinced to purpose, that the representations ministers give of those torments, agreeable to the word of God, are indeed as dreadful as they declare.--Since God hath undertaken to deal with sinners, and to rectify their judgments in these matters, he will do it thoroughly.⁵⁵

They will not be able to overcome their Enemy, nor will there be any way to appease him, nor to escape; and there will be nothing in hell to relieve them--no resting place, no secret corner cooler than the rest, no cooling stream or fountain, nor even a drop of water; no company to give them any comfort or to do them any good.

Judgment may come at any moment. The famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," was based upon Deut. 32:35, "Their foot shall slide in due time," which, to the evangelist, implied that the wicked are slated for destruction, that it will be sudden, that they are likely to fall of themselves without being thrown down by another, and that the only reason that they have not already fallen is that God's appointed time has not come, for the text says that their foot shall slide "in due time." Thus

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

sinners were pictured as being kept from the destruction toward which they always tended only by the grace of God momentarily holding them up. "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God," a sovereign pleasure, restrained by no obligation.⁵⁶

With these presuppositions laid down as being implied in the scripture text, the way was prepared for a particularization and specific application that made the unconverted listener feel that he was on the very brink of hell. "Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen."⁵⁷ Their best efforts cannot assure them that they will be kept out of hell for one moment. The fact that there is no evident danger of accident or disaster does not provide grounds for comfort, for all circumstances are in God's control. God is as angry with some who sit at ease in the congregation as he is with many who are already in hell. He is not unmindful of their wickedness:

The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation

⁵⁶ Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Works, op. cit., II, 7.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.

.....

There are in the souls of wicked men those hellish principles reigning, that would presently kindle and flame out into hell-fire, if it were not for God's restraints. There is laid in the very nature of carnal men, a foundation for the torments of hell. There are those corrupt principles, in reigning power in them, and in full possession of them, that are seeds of hell-fire.⁵⁸

One who is reading this sermon and is at liberty to stop in the middle of it and contemplate its finer points may observe that Edwards saw in the very wicked passions of men's hearts the kind of stuff of which "hell-fire" is made, and he might wonder if Edwards thought of hell as something other than literal fire.

These principles are active and powerful, exceeding violent in their nature, and if it were not for the restraining hand of God upon them, they would soon break out, they would flame out after the same manner as the same corruptions, the same enmity, does in the hearts of damned souls, and would beget the same torments as they do in them. . . . Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul; it is destructive in its nature; and if God should leave it without restraint, there would need nothing else to make the soul perfectly miserable. The corruption of the heart of man is immoderate and boundless in its fury; and while wicked men live here, it is like fire pent up by God's restraints, whereas if it were let loose, it would set on fire the course of nature; and as the heart is now a sink of sin, so,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into a fiery oven, or a furnace of fire and brimstone.⁵⁹

He meant that hell is absolutely certain for the unconverted. It could result simply from God's withholding his restraining grace and allowing the evil in the human heart to smolder and flame and break out into a very hell of torment--the same torment that the wicked are now enduring in hell.

What is this torment? Is it literal fire? His answer was that the soul would be turned into a fiery oven or a furnace of fire and brimstone by the outbreaking of its own sin. But did he mean literal fire? He did not argue the point. Certainly he saw something more than literal fire, which gave his preaching a depth not possessed by most of his contemporaries, but he did not hesitate to preach in terms of the literal. He took it for granted that when the Bible said fire it meant fire, a fire kindled by the wrath of God, as was insisted upon in his sermons, a fire which was absolutely demanded by the very nature of sin, which is the point he was urging in the above quotations.

Winslow, commenting upon his picturing of the saved as being gathered to Abraham's bosom (literally) and the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

damned pouring, like a current, into a lake of fire, says: "He admitted that there was a figurative as well as a literal significance to biblical symbol, yet for sermon purposes he dwelt on the literal."⁶⁰ His purpose in the pulpit was not speculation, but persuasion. Although there is an inkling in the above sermon quotations that he looked upon hell as symbolic of the torments already beginning in the hearts of the wicked, he did not develop that thought as opposed to a literal burning in the "flames of hell" which "do now rage and glow."

Had he raised a question about the literalness of hell, some of his listeners might have arrived at the conclusion that there was no hell. The thought that spiritual bodies would not be affected by literal flames as we know them but that hell would be fully as bad though of a different quality might suggest to some minds even more fearful possibilities; but others might conclude that anything would be better than literal flames and draw some comfort from the thought. In sermons of this nature Edwards was not desiring to comfort but to convert. Nor was he insincere in his preaching, as though he believed one thing about hell and preached another. As a matter of fact, he believed both the literal and the figurative and preached them as

⁶⁰ Winslow, op. cit., p. 145.

belonging to one bundle and as constituting a terrible and arresting truth. "Hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain lay hold on them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out."⁶¹ The flames of hell, a literal expression of the wrath of God, are reaching up toward them; and the fire pent up in their own hearts, which should be understood as figurative, is ready to break out and blend with the flames of hell to complete the misery.

Edwards was not concerned with the chemical elements of the flame, whether it be fire as we know it or something kindling in the hearts of wicked men, or both. He did not undertake in his preaching, and probably not in his thinking, to weigh the figurative possibilities over against the literal; but he firmly believed and relentlessly insisted upon its reality. The Confession of Faith says, "The wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power,"⁶² thus stating the fact without attempting to describe the ingredients of the

⁶¹ Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Works, op. cit., II, 9.

⁶² The Confession of Faith, op. cit., p. 174.

punishment. Hodge, commenting upon it, points out that the Bible describes the punishment as "fire that shall not be quenched," "fire unquenchable," "the worm that never dies," "a bottomless pit," the necessity of paying "the uttermost farthing," "the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever;" but he does not attempt to define the nature of the fire.⁶³

To take all these passages absolutely literally and to attempt to fit them into one systematic description of the future state of the wicked would involve one in endless and futile questions. How could hell be a "lake of fire," and still be "outer darkness"? Literal fire gives off light as well as heat. Moreover, the mental pictures suggested by the words "lake of fire" and "outer darkness" are both quite different from that suggested by the words, "bottomless pit." What would be the profit, however, of debating which of the above phrases describes hell, or in case all of them do, how the several pictures could be fitted together? Why plan sermons to satisfy a morbid curiosity, when the purpose of them should be to move the soul toward God? Why not accept all the warnings of Scripture as admonitions to flee the wrath of God and to accept his grace as offered in Christ Jesus? John Milton, manipulating the

⁶³ Archibald Alexander Hodge, A Commentary on the Confession of Faith (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1869), p. 533.

difficulties of too much questioning into the nature of hell fire, observed that the human body could get used to anything, perhaps eventually even to the extreme heat of hell, and asked whether it might not be necessary for God to dump the lost periodically onto something corresponding to the north pole, by way of contrast.

Edwards avoided this type of speculation concerning the ingredients of punishment. Winslow says that while some of the arguments in his two-hour discourses may seem irrelevant to a modern reader, they were never trivial.

Passing by, then, opportunities to argue over the figurativeness or literalness of hell-fire, Edwards pressed its actuality upon his hearers with all his might. "The Reason why men No more Regard warnings of Future punishment is because it Don't seem real to them,"⁶⁴ he wrote as the doctrine for one of his sermons. He then proceeded to make it real to them by the method most natural to him, particularization of the horror in tangible, visible form.

You have often seen a spider, or some other noisome insect, when thrown into the midst of a fierce fire, and have observed how immediately it yields to the force of the flames. There is no long struggle, no fighting against the fire, no strength exerted to oppose the heat or to fly from it; but it immediately stretches forth itself and yields; and the fire takes possession

⁶⁴ Winslow, op. cit., p. 144.

of it, and at once it becomes full of fire. Here is a little image of what you will be in hell, except you repent and fly to Christ.⁶⁵

.....

We can conceive but little of the matter; but to help your conception, imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven, or a great furnace, where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire, as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, and all the while full of quick sense; what horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace! and how long would that quarter of an hour seem to you! And after you had endured it for one minute, how overbearing would it be to you to think that you had it to endure the other fourteen! But what would be the effect on your soul, if you knew you must lie there enduring that torment to the full for twenty-four hours! And how much greater would be the effect, if you knew you must endure it for a thousand years!--O then, how would your hearts sink, if you knew, that you must bear it for ever and ever. . . . But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.⁶⁶

To say that there is a hell would simply convey an idea. To say that it is a terrible place might fail utterly to move an hardened sinner. But as the preacher went on to particularize, the accumulated horror of it became almost unbearable. Winslow sensed the force of this type of preaching and characterized it thus:

Beginning by thrusting the little fingers of his congregation into the flame, then their hands, their arms, their whole bodies, he presently pushed them

⁶⁵ Edwards, "The Future Punishment of the Wicked," Works, op. cit., II, 82.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

headlong into a quivering lake of fire. Even then he did not stop, but forced them to imagine the excruciating pain of fire "Running into our Mouths & filling our Lungs,--Running into our Ears and Nostrils," to be endured world without end, while tortured sensibilities remained undeadened to the agony.⁶⁷

Heaven and hell were as real to Edwards as the streets of his home town, and he made them seem real to his hearers.⁶⁸

The punishment of those condemned to hell was depicted as absolutely eternal. "And though it will never be annihilated, its being and perception well never be abolished."

The word everlasting is used in the very sentence of the Judge at the last day, whom we cannot suppose to use rhetorical tropes and figures. The wicked that are finally impenitent, are represented as wholly cast away, lost, made no account of, &c. which is quite inconsistent with their punishment being medicinal, and for their good and purification, and to fit them for final and eternal happiness.--Eternal punishment is not eternal annihilation. Surely they will not be raised to life at the last day only to be annihilated.⁶⁹

In the long discourse on "Endless Punishment" quoted above, Edwards asked questions of those who might advance theories opposing the eternality of the punishment, and sought to show that they all have flaws. If any should

⁶⁷ Winslow, op. cit., p. 144.

⁶⁸ Joseph Tracy, The Great Awakening (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1842), p. 214. For Edwards' use of sensational psychology, see Chapter VI of this thesis.

⁶⁹ Edwards, "Concerning the Endless Punishment of Those who Die Impenitent," Works, op. cit., II, 515.

suppose, he said, that the wicked will suffer penal torments for an indefinitely long time, until justice is done for the sins they committed upon earth, and then be restored to fellowship with God and brought into happiness, another factor should also be considered. What about the sins they commit during the very long period of suffering under God's hand and blaspheming against him? Surely at the end of the suffering for the sins done on earth, there will be a much greater sentence awaiting them for the sins committed during their much longer period of suffering. And the second sentence must be followed by a third, and so on forever, so that there never can be an end of their misery.

Using the same type of reasoning, he sought to answer a long list of possible objections and concluded by calling the objections "cavils." If the terrible sufferings of little children, women, and people of all classes through wars, diseases, and the crimes of the wicked were not perfectly obvious and undeniable, he argued,--if they were matters of faith, to be received by faith through testimony of the spoken word--the same people who object to the doctrine of eternal punishment would object violently to anyone trying to convince them that God lets little children suffer in this life through the wrongs of others.

Such were the convictions of Edwards that led him to preach the "hell-fire" sermons for which he has been

widely known and severely criticized.

III. THE DOCTRINES IN EDWARDS' PRESENTATION

In the introduction to this chapter the preaching of Edwards on the glory of the saved and the plight of the lost was compared to a coin having a bright side and a dark side and turning so that first one side and then the other was visible to the congregation. The above pages dealt with Edwards' concepts of the glory of the saved and the plight of the lost. An examination of his use of the concepts in preaching is the next concern, considering first the balance between light and dark, then the motive behind his contrasting preaching, and finally the attitude with which the preacher presented his themes.

The Balance--Positive and Negative

The denunciatory note was prominent, to say the least, in Edwards' preaching. This is a fatal criticism according to the standards of today, when men are looking not for that which tears down but for that which builds up. Nor is this generation alone in desiring encouragement rather than rebuke. People have always had that preference. In fairness to Edwards, however, one should bear in mind that the denunciatory aspect did not exclude the more attractive. The actual proportion of what might be called "posi-

tive" and "negative" preaching was not so unbalanced as has commonly been supposed. Winslow says that his familiar "Eternity of Hell Torments" was no more typical of his themes than "It would be worth the while to be Religious if only for the Pleasantness of it."⁷⁰ A sampling of sermons showing a predominantly positive approach is listed in Chapter V of this thesis.

Edwards' intention was to preach both the "terrors of the law" and "Christ" as the "end of the law for righteousness." "The gospel is to be preached as well as the law, and the law is to be preached only to make way for the gospel, and in order that it may be preached more effectually. The main work of ministers is to preach the gospel: 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.'"⁷¹ The warning emphasis was there, and it was pressed with vigor. Edwards intended that it should be so: "The law is very much to be insisted on, and the preaching of the gospel is like to be in vain without it."⁷² Yet the measure of wrath that Edwards held over the heads of the unconverted was no greater than the love of God which he asserted that they had spurned.

⁷⁰ Winslow, op. cit., p. 137.

⁷¹ Edwards, "Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," Works, op. cit., II, 266.

⁷² Ibid.

Think it not strange that God should deal so severely with thee, or that the wrath which thou shalt suffer should be so great. For as great as it is, it is no greater than that love of God which thou hast despised. The love of God, and his grace, condescension, and pity to sinners in sending his Son into the world to die for them, is every whit as great and as wonderful as this inexpressible wrath. This mercy hath been held forth to thee, and described in its wonderful greatness, hundreds of times, and as often hath been offered to thee; but thou wouldst not accept Christ; thou wouldst not have this great love of God; thou despisedst God's dying love; thou trampledst the benefits of it under foot. Now why shouldst thou not have wrath as great as that love and mercy which thou despisest and rejectest?⁷³

A basic problem arises here. How can one believe in the love of a God who can hate so when opposed? Jonathan Edwards anticipated the question, and undertook to demonstrate logically that "it is not contrary to the divine perfections to inflict on wicked men a punishment that is absolutely eternal."⁷⁴

It is an unreasonable and unscriptural notion of the mercy of God, that he is merciful in such a sense that he cannot bear that penal justice should be executed. This is to conceive of the mercy of God as a passion to which his nature is so subject that God is liable to be moved, and affected, and overcome by seeing a creature in misery, so that he cannot bear to see justice executed: which is a most unworthy and absurd notion of the mercy of God, and would, if true, argue great weakness. . . . The Scriptures every where represent the mercy of God as free and sovereign, and

⁷³ Edwards, "The Future Punishment of the Wicked," Works, op. cit., II, 81.

⁷⁴ Edwards, "The Eternity of Hell Torments," Works, op. cit., II, 83.

not that the exercises of it are necessary, so that God cannot bear justice should take place.⁷⁵

If, said Edwards, we begin with a presupposition that God's mercy is such that eternal misery of the creature, though just, is contrary to his nature, then increasing the mercy would make a less degree of misery contrary to it. Since God's mercy is infinite, then all misery would be contrary to God's nature. This, he said, is obviously not true, as it is evident that in this life God does inflict calamities on mankind.

Edwards located the core of the problem in an inadequate sense of the "infinite evil, odiousness, and provocation there is in sin."⁷⁶

When we hear or read of some horrid instances of cruelty, it may be to some poor innocent child, or some holy martyr--and their cruel persecutors, having no regard to their shrieks and cries, only sported themselves with their misery, and would not vouchsafe even to put an end to their lives--we have a sense of the evil of them, and they make a deep impression on our minds. Hence it seems just, every way fit and suitable, that God should inflict a very terrible punishment on persons who have perpetrated such wickedness. It seems no way disagreeable to any perfection of the Judge of the world; we can think of it without being at all shocked. The reason is, that we have a sense of the evil of their conduct, and a sense of the proportion there is between the evil or demerit and the punishment.

Just so, if we saw a proportion between the evil of sin and eternal punishment, if we saw something in

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

wicked men that should appear as hateful to us, as eternal misery appears dreadful; something that should as much stir up indignation and detestation, as eternal misery does terror; all objections against this doctrine would vanish at once.⁷⁷

It is suitable that God should hate sin, as sin is infinitely hateful; and if it is proper for him to have an infinite hatred of sin, then the expressions of such hatred would also be proper. God's love expresses itself not in a toleration of sin, but in providing a Savior from sin. Edwards, far from feeling handicapped by believing that God can hate as well as love, felt his appreciation of that love sharpened by a realization of the unloveliness of the creatures to whom it was offered. If they despise God's dying love, why should they not have wrath as great as the love and mercy which they reject?

The predominance of the negative in Edwards' preaching was due partly to his style. It was argumentative, and did not lend itself as easily to describing the beauties of a Christian's relationship with his Lord as it did to warning against the dangers of forsaking him. His was more the language of the courtroom than the language of a flower garden. In presenting his thoughts he was more of a lawyer than a poet. When it came to speaking of things as intimate and beautiful as the spiritual joys of the Christian

⁷⁷ Ibid.

life, his language was too formal, logical, technical, and precise.

He took a text from Scripture, stated what he believed to be its teaching as a proposition, and proceeded to prove the proposition, step by step, part by part, as logically as he could. He did this even with the glorious, transcendent themes concerning the Christian's happiness and hope. For instance, in a sermon quoted on page 82 of this thesis, he endeavored to establish as facts that men thirst after happiness, that the happiness needs to be great enough to fill their souls, and that there is nothing sufficiently excellent to do that except Jesus Christ, and then went on to prove that Christ is sufficiently excellent and to point out ways in which he satisfies the soul.

Such preaching had a cumulative effect, depending upon how satisfactorily each point in the argument was proved, and those listening who could not refute the arguments had little choice but to be convinced. The style was not, however, as well suited to the positive as to the negative. Some things in the Christian life, especially the intimate, personal relationship with Christ and its attending joys, need not so much to be analyzed and proved as to be appreciated and enjoyed. Edwards' way of presenting such concepts was plodding and methodical compared with the expression of Augustine:

He Thine only Son, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, hath redeemed me with His blood. Let not the proud speak evil of me; because I own my ransom, and eat and drink, and communicate it; and poor, desired to be satisfied from Him, amongst those that eat and are satisfied, and they shall praise the Lord who seek Him.⁷⁰

Another consideration is the fact that revivalism fostered intensity of feeling--both ecstasy and terror--which tended to get out of hand. It will be easily recognized that, although Edwards himself was even-tempered, his preaching, with its strong emphasis upon personal, individual salvation, encouraged introspection which in turn made people acutely conscious of their changing moods and inner feelings. Some experienced fear amounting to actual terror; others, as Brainerd and Mrs. Edwards, reached equally high degrees of joy and exultation. These feelings, encouraged by the preacher and openly expressed by converts, quickly came to be looked upon as guages of spiritual life. As such they were desired, sought after, and in some cases imitated or artificially induced by persons who had no religious experience that Edwards would acknowledge as genuine. Brainerd, in one of his last works, described the danger of artificial religious experience:

How much stress is laid by many upon some things as being effects and evidences of exalted degrees of religion, when they are so far from being of any importance

⁷⁰ Augustine, Confessions, op. cit., p. 273.

in it, that they are really irreligious. . . . It is to be feared, that the conversions of some have no better foundation than this; viz. that after they have been under some concern for their souls for a while, and, it may be, manifested some very great and uncommon distress and agonies, they have on a sudden imagined they saw Christ, in some posture or other, perhaps on the cross, bleeding and dying for their sins; or it may be, smiling on them, and thereby signifying his love to them: and that these and the like things, though mere imagination, which have nothing spiritual in them, have instantly removed all their fears and distresses, filled them with raptures of joy, and made them imagine, that they loved Christ with all their hearts; when the bottom of all was nothing but self-love, and consequently never had any love to him for himself. Or . . . some having had a passage, or perhaps many passages, or Scripture brought to their minds with power (as they express it), such as that, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee," and the like, they have immediately applied these passages to themselves, supposing that God hereby manifested his peculiar favour to them, as if mentioned by name And thus these rejoice upon having some scripture suddenly suggested to them, or impressed upon their minds, supposing they are now the children of God. . . and thus all reasoning with some of them is utterly excluded.

But it is remarkable of these, that they are extremely deficient in regard of true poverty of spirit . . . as also in regard of meekness, love, gentleness towards mankind, and tenderness of conscience in their ordinary affairs and dealings in the world. And they do not know, or do not consider, wherein the essence of true religion consists--viz. in being conformed to the image of Christ, not in point of zeal and fervency only, but in all divine tempers and practices.⁷⁹

Edwards quoted with approval the above statement by Brainerd and added that those who had the false religion referred to were in the habit of claiming they were "sealed

⁷⁹ Edwards, "The Life and Diary of the Rev. David Brainerd," Works, op. cit., II, 451.

by the Holy Ghost," and that God had forsaken the standing ministry and that God's people should forsake them; in contradiction to which Edwards cited Brainerd as being one of the standing ministry, ordained and commissioned by them, and showing more evidence of the power of God in his ministry than any of his fanatical opponents.

This demonstrates that the unbalanced experiences common during the Great Awakening, while stemming at least indirectly from the preaching of the revivalists, were lamented by them. Edwards himself did not make a show of his emotions. His outward demeanor was calm. His sermons were read from a closely written manuscript, until Whitefield inspired him to speak more extemporaneously, and his outbreaks of tears, singing and praying were reserved for times when he was alone. Sometimes he bolted the doors to be assured of privacy when he felt compelled vocally to pour out his praise to God. He made a secret of his private devotions.⁸⁰ There was a marked difference between the goals of such men as Edwards and Brainerd and some of the results of their preaching. It is significant to note, however, that the extremes of joy reached almost if not quite the same proportions as the extremes of terror.

The religion of the revivals was one of tremendous

⁸⁰ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, ccxxv.

contrasts. The same person, if following the pattern of the preaching and the usual experience of converts, passed from a period of acute alarm at his lost condition and the prospect of punishment, into immense relief upon feeling that he had been forgiven and into great joy in contemplating the goodness and mercy of God. The contrast was almost too much for some personalities, and extremes were not uncommon.

Thus, while Edwards' sermons on negative themes were striking and memorable and have become equated with his ministry, there was more of a balance than generally has been recognized.

More important than the actual balance between "lovely" and "terrible" sermons is the fact that, coming from the same preacher, sermons of both types had a common background. There was certainly something of the austere in the "lovely" sermons. This writer is convinced that there was something of the lovely in the terrible ones--something which would make them attractive rather than repellent. It must have been so, or people would not have tolerated the sermons of Edwards. Reasons for so believing are brought out in the sections below on his motive and attitude.

The Motive--"Awakening"

Edwards preached his fearful sermons in order to prepare his listeners to accept the gospel. "A minister would miss it very much if he should insist so much on the terrors of the law, as to forget his Lord, and neglect to preach the gospel."⁸¹ Luther said the same thing in his Commentary on Galatians when he pointed out that Cain "was brought face to face with his crime so that he should hurry to God for mercy and for pardon."⁸² (This, of course, Cain was not willing to do).

Edwards deliberately endeavored to make the contrast between the saved and the lost as sharp as possible. The approach was dictated partly by his natural inclination and ability to paint vivid word pictures and to draw a net of closely-knit arguments. More specifically, however, he felt that it was required by the lethargy of his generation.

It was a very decadent New England into which Edwards was born. . . . The religious fervor which the Puritan immigrants had brought with them into the New World had not been able to propagate itself to the third and fourth generation. Already in 1678, Increase

⁸¹ Edwards, "Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," Works, op. cit., II, 266.

⁸² Martin Luther, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, trans. Theodore Graebner (Third edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 142.

Mather had bewailed that "the body of the rising generation is a poor, perishing, and (except the Lord pour down His Spirit) an undone generation."⁸³

There were many persons in the churches who simply "owned the covenant," witnessing to an intellectual belief but having no heart knowledge of God. As a result of the influence of Stoddard there were many who partook of the Lord's Supper as though it had an edifying effect upon the unbeliever. Edwards felt called upon to issue an imperative warning. He undertook to make the lost feel utterly lost, that they might be sensible of their need of a Savior. He believed as did Calvin that "we shall never have sufficient confidence in him, unless we entirely lose all confidence in ourselves."⁸⁴

In many of Edwards' sermons the application, that part in which he pled with sinners to accept Christ, was longer than the entire portion devoted to expounding the doctrine. There are seasons in which God exercises his mercy, he told his people, and other seasons in which he shows his wrath. At some times in this community there is more to draw you to Christ and to help you to accept him than at other times. Those living in this present season of awakening may very

⁸³ Benjamin E. Warfield, Studies in Theology (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 516.

⁸⁴ Calvin, Institutes, op. cit., I, 831.

probably never live to see another.

And what good will that do you, to have the Spirit of God poured out upon earth, in the place where you once lived, while you are tormented in hell? What will it avail you, that others are crying, What shall I do to be saved? while you are shut up for ever in the bottomless pit, and are wailing and gnashing your teeth in everlasting burnings?⁸⁵

Many people, he complained, were so "sottishly unbelieving" about future things, about heaven and hell, that they would commonly run the venture of damnation rather than be convinced.

In preaching terror, Edwards was not simply trying to be dramatic. He did not object to violent emotions, if they were caused by sufficient legitimate intellectual considerations; but he did not indulge in extravagances designed to stir emotions. This requires to be said, because "hell-fire" preaching was ridiculously used by some in his day. Charles Chauncy, pastor of the old First Church in Boston and leader of those opposing the Great Awakening, charged: "The Gentlemen, whose preaching has been most remarkably accompanied with these Extraordinaries, not only use, in their Addresses to the People, all the terrible Words they can get together, but in such a Manner, as naturally tends to put weaker Minds out of the Possession

⁸⁵ Edwards, "Pressing into the Kingdom," Works, op. cit., I, 659.

of themselves."⁸⁶

James Davenport, one of the revivalists of the time, was described thus by Chauncy:

At length, he turn'd his Discourse to others, and with the utmost strength of his Lungs address himself to the Congregation, under these and such-like Expressions; viz. You poor unconverted Creatures, in the Seats, in the Pews, in the Galleries, I wonder you don't drop into Hell! It would not surprise me, I should not wonder at it, if I should see you drop down now, this Minute into Hell. You Pharisees, Hypocrites, now, now, now, you are going right into the Bottom of Hell. I wonder you don't drop into Hell by Scores, and Hundreds, etc. . . . Then he came out of the pulpit, and stripped off his upper Garments, and got into the Seats, and leapt up and down some time, and clapt his Hands, and cried out in those Words, the War goes on, the Fight goes on, the Devil goes down, the Devil goes down; and then betook himself to stamping and screaming most dreadfully.⁸⁷

Chauncy heartily opposed Edwards and did not hesitate to make such personal remarks about him as that Edwards "might not be suppos'd to be in a proper Temper of Mind to receive the Truth";⁸⁸ but he did not venture to draw any such picture of Edwards as he did of Davenport. "It must of course be said," write Faust and Johnson, "that men like Edwards were not guilty of the kind of

⁸⁶ Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, Jonathan Edwards, Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes (New York: American Book Company, 1935), pp. xix-xx.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. xviii.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. xxi.

of sensationalism just described."⁸⁹

Yet Edwards did intend to impress what he believed to be the truth upon the minds and hearts of his hearers. He preached frightening sermons, and some of them were accompanied by startling psychological disturbances. His purpose was to tell people the truth, as he understood it, and to expect an emotional response in keeping with the import of the message. "I should think myself in the way of my duty, to raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can, provided they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with."⁹⁰ Sermons intended to "awaken" the conscience, reasoned Edwards, should not be preached in a cold, matter-of-fact way: "Certainly such earnestness and affection in speaking is beautiful, as becomes the nature and importance of the subject."⁹¹

It is a reasonable thing, wrote Edwards, to endeavor to frighten people away from hell, just as one would endeavor to persuade a person to flee from a burning building.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. xviii.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Edwards, "Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," Works, op. cit., II, 266.

As one's manner would be urgent in warning of the need to flee, so it would be natural for the warning sermon to be presented with feeling. His motive was to use "awakening" sermons to prepare the way for redemption. He saw a pattern for warning in Scripture. In one of his greatest writings, "A History of the Work of Redemption," he spoke of the destruction of Sodom as contributing to the work of redemption through its sobering effects upon that and later generations.

Another way that this awful destruction tended to promote this great affair of redemption, was, that hereby God remarkably exhibited the terrors of his law, to make men sensible of their need of redeeming mercy. The work of redemption never was carried on without this. The law, from the beginning, is made use of as a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ.⁹²

Adam, for many generations, proclaimed the awful effects of the fall; the flood served to manifest the wrath of God against sin and to make men conscious of their need of redeeming mercy. But by the time of Abraham the flood had been in great measure forgotten, and the destruction of Sodom came as a new and amazing demonstration of divine wrath against sin, being "the liveliest image of hell of any thing that ever had been."⁹³ "By this," wrote

⁹² Edwards, "A History of the Work of Redemption," Works, op. cit., I, 545.

⁹³ Ibid.

Edwards, "might be seen the dreadful wrath of God against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; which tended to show the necessity of redemption, and so to promote that great work."⁹⁴

Under the New Testament, Edwards taught, there is not the same need for extraordinary, visible, sensible manifestations of God's wrath against sin, "since the future state, and the eternal misery of hell, is more clearly revealed, and since the awful justice of God against the sins of men has been so wonderfully displayed in the sufferings of Christ."⁹⁵

It might be objected that conversions brought about by fear would not be real conversions, but would rather be selfish attempts to escape from hell; that they would not last after the terror had subsided; and that they would not issue in the true fruit of righteousness. With this objection Edwards would thoroughly agree. His preaching of the terrors of the law was intended simply to open the way for the preaching of the gospel. The demands and the penalties of the law were to break open the heart, enable it to see its own vileness and corruption, and condition it to embrace the Savior. His aim was not to terrify people,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

but to awaken convictions of conscience, which to him were two entirely different things.

Terror, and a conviction of conscience, are different things. For though convictions of conscience often cause terror; yet they do not consist in it; and terrors often arise from other causes. Convictions of conscience, through the influences of God's Spirit, consist in conviction of sinfulness in heart and practice, and of the dreadfulness of sin, as committed against a God of terrible majesty, infinite in holiness and hatred of sin, and strict justice in punishing of it. But some persons have frightful apprehensions of hell--a dreadful pit ready to swallow them up, flames just ready to lay hold of them, and devils all around ready to seize them--who at the same time seem to have very little proper light of conscience really convincing them of their sinfulness of heart and life.⁹⁶

Once man's haughty rebellion against God has been broken down by the Spirit's influence through the preaching of the law, and he turns penitently to God and finds him to be a gracious and a loving Savior, a motivation stronger than fear takes control.

The affection of love is as it were the fountain of all affection; and particularly, . . . Christian love is the fountain of all gracious affections. Now the divine excellency of God, and of Jesus Christ, the word of God, his works, ways, &c. is the primary reason, why a true saint loves these things; and not any supposed interest that he has in them, or any conceived benefit that he has received or shall receive from them.⁹⁷

Fear itself does not convert; but Edwards was convinced that

⁹⁶ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 253.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 275. See also Chapter V of this thesis, on the essence of conversion.

it could be used legitimately to awaken men to their need of conversion. He considered it the preacher's duty to make men acutely aware both of the certainty of judgment and of the open door to redemption.

The Attitude--Love?

Weighing the content of a man's written sermons is an objective undertaking. Inquiring into his motives is more subjective. Attempting to sense his attitude in preaching is quite subjective. Nevertheless, it is important.

It is not always easy to take the written sermons of a man and, simply by reading them, experience the effects that were wrought in the hearers of those sermons when they were first preached. Circumstances and environments of thought change from age to age causing us to look at the written words from a standpoint very different from that of the first hearers. In addition to that difficulty, the manner and spirit in which a sermon is delivered has a great deal to do with the effect it will have upon a congregation. If one should see a strange dog in his garden, and should rush out of the house shouting in a gruff voice, "Come here, Come here!" the dog would almost certainly run away. If, however, he should decide to experiment and should move quietly toward the dog saying

in a soothing, inviting tone, "Go away, Go away," the dog would be likely to come to him wagging his tail. The dog would have read, not the words, but the tone. He would have been affected not by what was said but by the attitude.

The words of a sermon are, of course, vitally important, and men and women are not like dogs, because they understand the actual meaning of words. Nevertheless it is true that they leave a church service not so much with a few thousand words stored in their heads as with certain basic impressions upon their minds and hearts, buttressed by the words but conveyed largely by the attitude of the speaker. A young minister cannot be assured of success simply by memorizing a great sermon and reciting it, because its greatness depended in large part upon the great spirit that first prepared and delivered it. Some sermons that are most effective when preached are least effective when read. Evangelist George Whitefield was once asked by newsmen for permission to publish his sermons, to which he replied that they might do so provided they would also publish the thunder and the lightning!

The manuscripts of some of Jonathan Edwards' more severe sermons convey the impression that he was all head and no heart--that his logic was harsh and unyielding and almost unbearable. Preaching of that kind, if it comes

from a heart devoid of love, falls under the condemnation of God through the words of the Apostle Paul, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal." The effects of the preaching of Edwards were, however, more than would be expected from sounding brass or clanging cymbals, and it is necessary to look to other sermons and writings to see if there are indications of a love for God and for men which would help to explain the power of his preaching. If such a love was there, it undoubtedly would shine through even the harsh words of his severe sermons and let the hearers know that they were listening to one who loved God and who loved them.

No two ministers are exactly alike, and no two, perhaps, have exactly the same emphasis in their preaching. Some are called to warn and others to comfort, some to stir and others to console. The dominant note in Edwards' evangelistic preaching was one of warning; but a genuine concern for the welfare of his hearers, if present, would make the warning palatable. Evangelists who rave, rant, accuse, and condemn their hearers are known to every age; but the effects of their sermons are not the same as those produced by the preaching of Edwards. (That the preaching of Edwards did have unusual effects is generally recognized. W. P. Paterson, in Conversion, page 98, speaks of the

awakenings in various parts of the world, including New England, in these terms:

In the eighteenth century there took place a wide-spread evangelical revival in which it was again seen that the gospel of justification by faith when proclaimed with burning conviction, and seconded by a movement of the Spirit in the spirit of an age, is an unequalled instrument for the transformation of the natural man.

On page 117 he continues, "New England, with its Puritan traditions and evangelists like Jonathan Edwards, was the scene of notable awakenings.")

An illustrative story is applicable at this point: A visitor at a church service asked one of the regular members what had happened to the man who had previously been the minister of that church. "He preached about hell," was the reply, "and said that some of us were going there; so we asked him to resign." The visitor in some surprise replied, "This man today preached the very same thing!" "Yes," said the member, "but the first man gave the impression that he was glad of it."

This is the dilemma that confronts one who reads the works of Edwards. Was he obsessed by the negative, or, was there an attitude of concern that won the confidence of his hearers?

Professor James Stewart, of the faculty of New College, Edinburgh, Scotland, gives this sound advice to those who would understand the writings of the Apostle Paul: "A deep

spiritual sympathy and kinship with Paul's own inner experience is the first requisite of any generation or Church or individual who would interpret his Gospel rightly."⁹⁸ The same may be said about the writings of any man. To interpret them one must come to know something of the experiences that were his, so that the words which he wrote will appear as nearly as possible in the same light in which they were written and, in the case of sermons, so that he may be able to sense the spirit in which the words were spoken.

Edwards had a great zeal for the glory of God. If his personal notes may be trusted and if we may believe the persons of his own day and shortly afterward who wrote about him, he loved God.⁹⁹ It hurt him deeply that people should not take God seriously, and that sin against him should appear to them insignificant. The chief end of man is to glorify God, and there are only two ways in which they can do that--either by serving him here, or by suffering his wrath hereafter. "Wicked Men Useful in their Destruction Only" was the subject of one of his sermons.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ James S. Stewart, A Man In Christ, The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1951), p. 16.

⁹⁹ For Edwards' conception of love, see Chapter I on the sovereignty of God and Chapter V on the essence of conversion.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, Works, op. cit., II, 125.

If men do not bring forth fruit to God, they will yet be useful to him, although passively, in their destruction. "The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil," says the writer of Proverbs, and Edwards proposed that in vindicating the righteous judgment of God through their just condemnation they will glorify God. If they were allowed to live on forever here, it would appear as though God were countenancing and encouraging their wickedness. They certainly could not go to heaven, because the enjoyments of heaven are "holy and spiritual, the happiness of beholding the glory of God, and praising his name,"¹⁰¹ and the wicked are certainly not suited to do that. The only way remaining for them to glorify God, which is the end for which they were created, is by bearing the full penalty of their offense against God. "The vindictive justice of God is a glorious attribute, as well as his mercy; and the glory of this attribute appears in the everlasting destruction and ruin of the barren and unfruitful."¹⁰²

Some readers have interpreted Edwards' insistence upon God's sovereignty and justice as an indication that he was harsh. Francis A. Christie says that while Edwards

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 127

¹⁰² Ibid.

was "venerated for the saintliness of his disciplined character, he was bitterly hated because of a pitiless logical consistency that trammelled life."¹⁰³ Charles Reynolds Brown, of Yale Divinity School, writing in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, says of Edwards' missionary work, "He loved books and theological disputation more than he loved Indians."¹⁰⁴ His sermons on the great and terrible themes of the Bible do seem merciless. He pictured the situation (the final judgment, for instance) in vivid detail, then turned to the rationalizations that men use to support their sense of immunity and demolished those "props" one by one until the sinner was left facing the inevitable result of his sin with no assurance that the full weight of judgment would be withheld even for a moment.

Yet one cannot be sure that the evangelist of Northampton was a cold, harsh, unloving minister. Winslow, in her biography of Edwards, expresses her belief that

characteristically, he was not an evangelistic preacher at all, in the usual understanding of the term. . . . When he was most himself, he was a quiet-spoken teacher, and a kindly though unsparing critic of men's conduct in the light of their religious obligations. Salvation was a recompense in itself as well as an escape from future torment. "It would be worth the while to be Religious if only for the pleasantness of it," is

¹⁰³ Christie, op. cit., p. 37

¹⁰⁴ Charles Reynolds Brown, "Jonathan Edwards," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1945 edition), VIII, 20.

quite as typical a sermon theme as that of the familiar "Eternity of Hell Torments," upon which his preaching reputation so securely rests.¹⁰⁵

Other revival sermons developed themes such as these:

"There is a sweet Harmony between Christ and the Soul of a True Christian"; "There never was a man that once understood what manner of man Christ was but his Heart was infallibly drawn to him."

Even when his preaching was severe, it was not necessarily due to an unloving spirit, because he considered it a kindness to tell people what he believed to be the truth.

If there be really a hell of such dreadful and never-ending torments, as is generally supposed, of which multitudes are in great danger--and into which the greater part of men in Christian countries do actually from generation to generation fall, for want of a sense of its terribleness, and so for want of taking due care to avoid it--then why is it not proper for those who have the care of souls to take great pains to make men sensible of it? Why should they not be told as much of the truth as can be? If I am in danger of going to hell, I should be glad to know as much as possibly I can of the dreadfulness of it. If I am very prone to neglect due care to avoid it, he does me the best kindness, who does most to represent to me the truth of the case, that sets forth my misery and danger in the liveliest manner.¹⁰⁶

It does not necessarily discredit his love for men that his ruling passion was a great respect and love for God's majesty, because the Sovereign God was presented

¹⁰⁵ Winslow, op. cit., p. 137

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, "Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," Works, op. cit., II, 264.

also as the Savior. Professor John Baillie, Principal of New College, Edinburgh, has aptly written:

He with whom we have in the last resort to reckon is not only our sovereign Overlord but also our Refuge and our Strength. If the obedience He demands of us is with a sole view to His own glory, it is also with a view to our salvation; and that is not a contradiction, because it is only in the glory of God that we can ever find salvation.¹⁰⁷

It is characteristic of the great Hebrew prophets that, when Israel was in a condition of enmity against God, they took their stand with God. Isaiah, Hosea, and Jeremiah suffered acutely in sympathy with the nation upon which they were sent to pronounce judgment, and they pleaded with their people to be reconciled to God; yet their first concern was that God should be vindicated, and any reconciliation must necessarily await a humbling of the people before him. Looking back upon the records, it is easy to see that those prophets who predicted judgment when judgment was actually coming were better friends of the people than were those false prophets who prophesied peace when there was no peace.

The Apostle Paul had a similar attitude. He loved the people of his own nation: "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen

¹⁰⁷ John Baillie, Our Knowledge of God (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 247.

according to the flesh . . . my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 9:2,3; 10:1). Yet he held out to them a hope of salvation only as they should submit themselves to God in Christ: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Edwards preached first the excellency and sovereignty of God. He preached that men may be saved only as they humble themselves under the mighty hand of God and await his mercy.

Edwards' written sermons do not manifest the obvious longings of heart, horizontally toward men, that characterized his expressions toward God. This is a very serious defect, and if true in its implications it is a damaging criticism of his entire ministry. The words of I John 4:20 are quite distinct: "He that loveth not his brother . . . how can he love God . . . ? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." One would think that, should an unattractive truth need to be told to a friend, the way of love would be to tell it in as kindly and gentle a way as possible. In Edwards one finds exactly the reverse. The miseries of hell were pictured in terms of terror to the full extent of the

preacher's ability, and the effect upon the hearers was made as shocking as possible. The sentiment of love faded farthest into the background, if it was there at all, when Edwards spoke of the righteous in heaven viewing the sufferings of the wicked in hell and rejoicing over them: "The sufferings of the damned will be no occasion of grief to the heavenly inhabitants. . . . It will be an occasion of their rejoicing. . . ."108

It would be an easy matter to close the discussion at this point and conclude that whatever virtue there may have been in the preaching of Edwards it had one fatal defect that rendered it impossible for any real good to have come from it. Lacking love, it was at best as "sounding brass," or a "tinkling sýmbal," and as such not worthy of further attention. The mind would not rest easily upon such a settlement, however, as disturbing considerations would rise up one after another to question whether the matter was not too obvious, and the conclusions too quickly reached. If Edwards had not charity, why was he not quickly forgotten? Why are books still being written about him? If he did not care for the people of his parish, why did he go to such pains to preach to them, especially upon such terrible subjects--unless it was that he hated them? But

108 Edwards, "The Portion of the Righteous," Works op. cit. II, 899.

that is less likely than that he loved them. Therefore, the mind must return to its study.

Surveying Edwards' sermons, one feels constrained to say that the sentiment of love for men was not in the foreground of his preaching. Love, however, being more than a sentiment, expresses itself not merely in emotion, but in action. "Love, whether used of God or man, is an earnest and anxious desire for, and an active and beneficent interest in, the well-being of the one loved . . . the manifestation thereof may differ according to the circumstances and relations."¹⁰⁹ It did not seem the least bit inconsistent to Edwards that he should express love to God in terms of the highest praise and to men in terms of sternest warning--provided he meant it for their good, to bring them into fellowship with God. If "eternal misery" and "divine vengeance" were subjects of discourse in a letter to a sick son, whom a father would naturally love, no surprise need be occasioned by the fact that they appeared frequently in sermons. If such was his custom in speaking to his own children, for whom he had a normal affection, it is no proof of lack of love for his parishioners that

¹⁰⁹ William Evans, "Love," The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), III, 1932.

he addressed them in the same way.

In preaching that men are offenders against God and therefore guilty and deserving of punishment, Edwards was not departing from the main stream of Christian tradition. Calvin wrote, "The reprobate will be delivered over into eternal fire with their bodies"; and he emphasized that "the equity of the divine sentence depends on that order of nature which he has sanctioned" and that "it has, therefore, no affinity with blind revenge."¹¹⁰ Augustine wrote, concerning the end of the wicked, that they are "destined to eternal misery, called the second death; because there, even the soul, being deprived of God, seems not to live, much less the body, being bound in everlasting torments. And therefore this second death shall be so much the more cruel, in that it shall never have end."¹¹¹

Paterson points out that "the work of Jesus in the remaking of souls began with a call of sinners to repentance," and goes on to say concerning the means of persuasion which Jesus used:

What was primarily impressed upon the sinner was that it was a matter of life and death that he should

¹¹⁰ John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis, trans. John King (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), I, 166.

¹¹¹ St. Augustine, The City of God (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1950), II, 267.

repent and turn to God . . . and that the final portion of the impenitent is a hell whose terrors were summed up as "the eternal fire" or as "the outer darkness" where there shall be "weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹¹²

Karl Barth, writing more recently, says: "For our knowledge of evil everything will depend on our recognizing that man is under the accusation of being the offender against God. We can only see the infinite guilt in which we stand over against God; the God who became man."¹¹³

Commenting upon Jesus' use of fear and hope as motivation, Paterson observes:

It has been an offence to some philosophical minds that the method used to lead sinners to repentance was to stir them by the fear of punishment and the hope of rewards. But if there be a future life which is a state of retribution--and the doctrine is a vital part of the Christian revelation--it may well be deemed an urgent duty as well as a kindness to make it known and persuade sinners to believe it.¹¹⁴

Ritschl reproached Melancthon for what he called an unworthy accommodation of the gospel message to the limitations of "the vulgar mind" when he advised preachers to begin with the terrors of the Law; but Paterson replies that "fear is a powerful dynamic, and it is not contemptible but laudable to make men afraid when there is good

¹¹² W. P. Paterson, Conversion (London: Hodder & Staughton, 1939), p. 47.

¹¹³ Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (London: S. C. M. Press Ltd., 1949), p. 105.

¹¹⁴ Paterson, loc. cit.

reason to fear."¹¹⁵

Edwards was different from the usual preacher in that he drew pictures of the glory of the saved and the plight of the lost with exceptional vividness, calling not only upon the pertinent statements of Scripture but upon all the implications that he felt could reasonably be drawn from them to make the pictures arresting.

In summary, Edwards had deep convictions not only about the dreadful prospect of the unsaved but also about the attractiveness of the Christian life; and these constituted a strong motivation to evangelistic preaching. Proceeding from the same heart and lips, the sermons of both types had a common background and were colored and made effective by the experiences, purposes, and attitudes of the preacher, so that there was more to the sermons than meets the eye of one who reads them in cold print.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAY OF SALVATION

In the preceding chapters certain of Edwards' basic convictions that lent urgency to his evangelistic efforts were discussed, namely: God's sovereignty, as the pivotal point in his evangelism; the glorious possibilities open to those who are saved; the awful plight of those who are and remain the enemies of God.

The next logical question is how those who are at enmity with God may be delivered from their plight and admitted to the privileges of the saved. At the risk of using a trite expression, but for the sake of clarity of purpose, this chapter is entitled "The Way of Salvation." It is doctrinal, having to do with the terms upon which God offers salvation to men and upon which they are to seek it. The actual experience of conversion--the steps by which a man appropriates salvation and the effect that it has upon him--in a sense belongs to this chapter; but it is such a large and important subject and involves so much of Edwards' use of human understanding and psychology that it has been reserved for subsequent treatment.

From a doctrinal standpoint, Edwards' presentation of the way of salvation laid emphasis upon man's dependence upon God who worked out a just basis for the salvation

of sinners and who offers salvation to them freely through faith, and upon man's duty to seek salvation with the utmost diligence. His soteriology is summarily expressed in two statements from his sermons. The first is given as the doctrine which he endeavored to prove in a sermon on Justification by Faith Alone: "That we are justified only by faith in Christ, and not by any manner of virtue or goodness of our own."¹ The second is an apparently opposite assertion in his sermon on The Manner of Seeking Salvation: "Though it be not needful that we do any thing to merit salvation, which Christ hath fully merited for all who believe in him; yet God, for wise and holy ends, hath appointed, that we should come to final salvation in no other way, but that of good works done by us."²

The first places Edwards within the ranks of reformed theologians, whose main tenet since the days of Luther has been, "The just shall live by faith." The second, understood in its context, separates him from all fatalists who say "What is to be will be," without regard to any effort on the part of the individual, and from all who preach salvation as a "ticket to heaven" that leaves men

¹ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," Works, op. cit., I, 623.

² Edwards, "The Manner of Seeking Salvation," Works, op. cit., II, 53.

free to sin with impunity. The coupling of the two together enabled him to proclaim salvation as a free gift from a sovereign God and at the same time a gift which men were to seek as their main business in life.

In the experience of Noah, Edwards saw these two apparently opposite concepts simultaneously and harmoniously working together:

God did not save Noah on account of the labour and expense he was at in building the ark. Noah's salvation from the flood was an instance of the free and distinguishing mercy of God. . . . Yet God was pleased to appoint, that Noah should be saved in this way.³

The ground and basis for salvation rests entirely within the sovereign mercy of God, but the imparting of salvation to the individual involves earnest seeking and wholehearted endeavor upon the part of the individual, because God has willed it so.

I. GOD'S ACTIVITY IN SALVATION

The plan of God for the salvation of sinners has been revealed in the Scriptures. Calvin says:

Let us not separate salvation from the knowledge of the truth; for God doth not mean to lie, nor deceive men, when He saith, when they come to the knowledge of the truth they shall be saved. God will have all men to be saved; but how? If they will come to the knowledge

³ Ibid.

of the truth.⁴

Augustine describes his conversion as being directly related to the Word of God. In great distress of soul, he heard a voice from a neighboring house say, "Take up and read; Take up and read." He took up a copy of the Epistle to the Romans and read, "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh." Having read this, the inner conflict of his soul was resolved and "all the darkness of doubt vanished away."⁵ Previous to his own conversion, he expressed great admiration for Victorinus, who, in the days of Emperor Julian, in obedience to a law forbidding Christians to teach sciences or oratory, had chosen "rather to give over the wordy school, than thy Word, by which Thou makest eloquent the tongues of the dumb."⁶

Professor Bernhard Citron, of New College, Edinburgh, writes:

In religious conversion man has the experience of

⁴ John Calvin, "The Salvation of All Men," The Mystery of Godliness (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 108.

⁵ St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. E. B. Pusey (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1950), p. 187.

⁶ Ibid., p. 172.

God's voice calling him and God's power drawing him by the influence of the Holy Spirit through the medium of His Word. In presenting the doctrine of conversion, we must rely on the Word and the Spirit of God.⁷

Edwards believed that men never would have come to a knowledge of the truth if it had not been revealed in the Scriptures. He saw in the Scriptures a plan of salvation that is surprising to men because it is not at all what they would have expected; but it appealed to him as being greatly glorifying to God. The Persons involved and the events transpiring in the working out of God's plan of salvation demonstrate the remarkable wisdom of God, a wisdom that man not only cannot match but can scarcely acknowledge once it has been revealed to him.

But since the gospel has told what God's counsels are, and how he has contrived a way for our salvation, men are ready to despise it, and foolishly to exalt their own understanding; and to imagine they could have found out as good a way themselves. When, alas! men, of themselves, had no notion of what was honourable to God, and suitable for a Divine Being.--They did not so much as think of the necessity of God's law being answered, and justice satisfied. And if they had, how dreadfully would they have been puzzled to have found out the way how!⁸

Edwards' references to God's activity in salvation convey the impression that he was wide-eyed with wonder at what he saw. The importance of this impression cannot

⁷ Bernhard Citron, New Birth (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 1951), pp. 3-4.

⁸ Edwards, "The Wisdom of God, Displayed in the Way of Salvation," Works, op. cit., II, 154.

be over-emphasized in a consideration of his evangelism. His sermon on "The Wisdom of God, Displayed in the Way of Salvation," for instance, reads like something other than a cold, theological dissertation, although it is deeply theological and painstakingly systematic. There is an evident participation of the writer in the things about which he wrote. His pen was guided by his reasonings, but those reasonings evidently found a deep response in his own heart. The following is an example:

Who would have thought of a trinity of persons in the Godhead; and that one should sustain the rights of the Godhead; and that another should be the Mediator; and another should make application of redemption? Who would have thought of such a thing as three distinct persons, and yet but one God? all the same Being, and yet three persons! Who would have thought of this, in order to have found out a way for satisfying justice? Who would have thought of a way for answering the law that threatened eternal death, without the sinners suffering eternal death? And who would have thought of any such thing as a divine person suffering the wrath of God?⁹

The first impression, even in reading the cold manuscript, is that the writer himself was deeply moved. As preached, with the warmth and life of a strong personality adding to its vitality, there must have been a thrill of excitement on the part of the listeners. Yet in these exclamatory questions there is the clear import of a theol-

⁹ Ibid.

ogy--a theology involving a doctrine of the Trinity; of the multiple functions of the Persons in the Godhead; of the justice and mercy of God; and of salvation through the sufferings of the divine Son.

There is a world of difference between a sorting of words, phrases, and concepts, and a standing in the very presence of the Great God and endeavoring from a full heart to relate what one sees. Some of Edwards' writings give the impression, at least from the written page (possibly not from his lips), that they are of the former sort. They lead one through a maze of minute and winding paths of reasoning until he finds himself at a conclusion, wondering why he did not find a proper place to get off the path before it led him there. Such are some of his combative works on the current problems of his day. When an issue has faded into the background, no one can get highly excited about a long treatise proving one side of it, however inthralling it may have been at the time.

Of greater interest to us in studying his evangelism, however, are those notes from his ministry that bear the stamp of one awed by the presence of the Sovereign God and opening his mouth to proclaim what he himself saw and felt of God. The above quoted paragraph is an example. It is packed full of theology, yet it breathes the air of discovery.

God is triune, "all the same Being, and yet three persons!"¹⁰ Calvin, tracing in his Institutes the apprehension and crystalization by the church of the doctrine of the trinity, noted the willingness of Arius to confess Christ as God, and the Son of God, while at the same time maintaining that he was created, and had a beginning like other creatures. "To draw the versatile subtlety of this man from its concealment," said Calvin, "the ancient Fathers proceeded further, and declared Christ to be the eternal Son of the Father, and consubstantial with the Father." By introducing the word ὁμοούσιος, the Fathers were introducing a technical, theological term, and dealing in fine theological distinctions which forced Arius to break with them. Calvin defended them by saying:

Who can dare to censure those good men, as quarrelsome and contentious, for having kindled such a flame of controversy, and disturbed the peace of the Church on account of one little word? That little word distinguished Christians, who held the pure faith, from sacrilegious Arians.¹¹

Calvin went on to say, concerning the words of technical differentiation:

I could wish them, indeed, to be buried in oblivion,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. John Allen (seventh American Edition; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, n.d.), I, 141.

provided this faith were universally received, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are the one God; and that nevertheless the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are distinguished from each other by some peculiar property.

Edwards insisted upon words being understood in their precise meanings, and he tied his theological system together with sometimes tedious arguments; but many passages in his writings give the impression that a full heart was longing for a better means of expression, and that he could wish the stiff terms "buried in oblivion" provided the faith by which he lived were universally received.

The Atonement

In Edwards' concept of the plan of salvation, all three persons of the Godhead are active. God the Father "sustains the rights of the Godhead,"¹² "provides the Saviour, and the purchase is made of him."¹³ "The Son is the purchaser and the price; and the Holy Spirit is the great blessing or inheritance purchased."¹⁴

The statement that God the Father "sustains the rights of the Godhead" sets the tone for and implies the direction

¹² Edwards, "The Wisdom of God, Displayed in the Way of Salvation," Works, op. cit., II, 154.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 274.

of Edwards' soteriology. It should be understood in the context of his personal attitude toward God, as brought out in the chapter on God's Sovereignty, and it was not intended by Edwards to convey any thought of God's being petty or stubborn, as a human being might be in insisting upon his personal rights. It is rather the expected outcome of a deep reverence for God, who is perfect and whose ways are beyond reproach. God's personal attributes and his purposes are such that any change in them could not be an improvement, but rather a deterioration. It is proper that he should have a supreme regard to himself.

Edwards declared that he found his greatest delight in the holiness of God, and that he would rather be himself condemned to hell than have God's holiness tarnished in the slightest degree. Salvation must come about by God's perfect requirements being met, not overlooked. It is accomplished not by revoking the principle that "the wages of sin is death," but by fulfilling it through the substitution of another's death in the place of the death of the sinner.

In sustaining the rights of the Godhead, the Father is not acting vindictively, but is being true to himself. His love and concern for those who have violated his perfect standard is unmistakably proved by his "providing the

Saviour."¹⁵ It is not a matter of the Father's being against men and Christ for them, but of the Father and the Son working together to save men without violating God's holiness. There is no hint of a payment being made to Satan for persons under his control. The thought is rather that God recognizes the sufferings of Christ as sufficient to meet the just requirements of the law.

Salvation from sin, therefore, requires redemption rather than mere forgiveness. "The Son is the purchaser and the price." "If it were possible," wrote Edwards,

for Christ to have failed of doing the will of the Father, and so to have failed of effectually working out redemption for sinners, then the salvation of all the saints who were saved from the beginning of the world to the death of Christ, was not built on a firm foundation. The Messiah, and the redemption which he was to work out by his obedience unto death, was the saving foundation of all that ever were saved.¹⁶

There was in Edwards' soteriology an objective basis, a "foundation," upon which all hope of salvation must depend.

D. M. Baillie, Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of St. Andrews, asks the question, "Can we dispense with the Jesus of history?"¹⁷ a question prompted

¹⁵ Cf. Romans 5:8, John 3:16.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, The Works of President Edwards, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1829-30), II, 142.

¹⁷ D. M. Baillie, God Was In Christ (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1948), p. 48.

by a statement from Kierkegaard: "If the contemporary generation had left behind them nothing but the words, 'We have believed that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that He lived and taught in our community, and finally died,' it would be more than enough." In answer, Baillie replies: "Would it really be enough and more than enough? There is the whole question in a nutshell. And one is disposed to reply: If no more than that was necessary, why was even that necessary? What would it avail us to be able to say so much, if we could say no more?"¹⁸ He goes on to urge that we need a real Jesus, and something more than the "partly falsified" pictures of him that the "Jesus of history" movement has sometimes produced.

It is not the mere picture of the Jesus of history, constructed by historical science, that lays hold of us for our salvation, but the whole Christian story, with both its historical and its supra-historical elements, which was the substance of the original kerygma: the story of how the Son of God became man in Christ for our salvation, suffered and died on the Cross for our sins, arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, intercedes for us there continually, and gives Himself to us through the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

Faith in Christ, as Edwards preached it, had a definite theological content. He spoke of the "things of

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

the gospel" as being

a firm persuasion that Christ Jesus is the Son of God, and the great and only Saviour of the world; and that the great doctrines of the Gospel, touching reconciliation by his blood, and acceptance in his righteousness, and eternal life and salvation through him, are matters of undoubted truth.²⁰

He understood those "great doctrines" to mean that God contrived a way "that a sinful creature should become not guilty; and that he who has no righteousness of his own, should become righteous."²¹ Such a change in the status of a guilty person was to be brought about, not by any lessening of God's requirements, but by an amazing plan of God involving a great sacrifice on his part and a oneness of believers with their Saviour that enabled God to consider his activity on their behalf as though they themselves had been active in it.

The following rather long quotation punctuates the preciseness of Edwards' ideas with regard to God's plan for the salvation of men:

He hath accomplished that men, though sinners, should be without guilt, in that he hath found out a way that the threatenings of the law should truly and properly be fulfilled, and punishment be executed on sin, and

²⁰ Jonathan Edwards, A Narrative of the Revival of Religion in New England, with Thoughts on that Revival. (Glasgo: Printed for Wm. Collins, 1829), p. 208.

²¹ Edwards, "The Wisdom of God, Displayed in the Way of Salvation," Works, op. cit., II, 149.

yet not on the sinner. The sufferings of Christ answer the demands of the law, with respect to the sins of those who believe in him; and justice is truly satisfied thereby. And the law is fulfilled and answered by the obedience of Christ, so that his righteousness should properly be our righteousness. Though not performed by us, yet it is properly and reasonably accepted for us, as much as if we had performed it ourselves.

Divine wisdom has so contrived, that such an interchanging of sin and righteousness should be consistent, and most agreeable with reason, with the law, and God's holy attributes. For Jesus Christ has so united himself to us, and us to him, as to make himself ours, our head. The love of Christ to the elect is so great, that God the Father looks upon it proper and suitable to account Christ and the elect as one; and accordingly to account what Christ does and suffers, as if they did and suffered it.--That love of Christ which is so great as to render him willing to put himself in the stead of the elect, and to bear the misery that they deserved, does, in the Father's account, so unite Christ and the elect, that they may be looked upon as legally one.²²

A great deal is said in these paragraphs about the "demands of the law," and about the necessity of justice being truly satisfied. This is to be expected, in view of the emphasis Edwards placed on the holiness of God. Salvation can only be accomplished by Christ so uniting himself to us, and us to him, that when he bore the punishment for sin, it was in God's sight as though the guilty sinner had himself suffered death and endured the full penalty prescribed by the law.

The phrase "legally one," quoted above, is reminiscent of the state of religion in New England just prior to

²² Ibid., pp. 149-150.

the "Great Awakening." Williston Walker, one-time professor of ecclesiastical history at Yale University, wrote that "though New England remained a religious land, the zeal of its founders had burned low by the opening of the eighteenth century."²³ B. K. Kuiper's comment is similar:

In the early part of the eighteenth century religious life in America was at a low ebb. The Puritans who had founded the New England colonies were men and women of a deep religious life and strong religious convictions; their grandchildren had lost nearly all religious fervor.²⁴

In a passage already quoted, Winslow points out that New England dissent had modified Calvinistic doctrine in the direction of a reasonable rather than an arbitrary God, until "by 1731 a theological system with a strongly legalistic bias had been developed, making the covenant of grace an hard contract, just about as binding upon God as upon man."²⁵

When the life dies out of a theological system, its boney structure can become an ugly thing, indeed, and, like a skeleton, a symbol of death. In the words of the Apostle, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life"

²³ Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), p. 568.

²⁴ B. K. Kuiper, The Church in History (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 418.

²⁵ Cf. p. 104.

(II Cor. 3:6). Theologically, Edwards' preaching called the people of New England back to a strongly Calvinistic doctrine, a doctrine which had largely lost its attractiveness to them, and from which they were rapidly turning away. It is understandable that they should lose interest in a Calvinism which was preached from many pulpits as cold formulas minus the thrill, wonder, and reverence that a Calvinistic appreciation of the sovereign majesty and grace of God should produce.

Edward's preaching put warm flesh and blood upon the bones of doctrine so that when he spoke of Christ and the elect as "legally one" he meant and said that it was the great love of Christ that made them so, and that enabled the Father to look upon them as being one with his Son. In Edwards' sermons there is not a trace of the legalism that binds God. Always he is Sovereign, bursting forth upon men in a glory of grace and love, aggressive in the matter of their salvation. People listened to Calvinistic preaching from his lips because it had a glory about it. His personal appreciation of the gospel message at times almost turned his bulky prose into poetry, as in the following instance:

The wisdom of God hath made Christ's humiliation the means of our exaltation; his coming down from heaven is that which brings us to heaven. The wisdom of God hath made life the fruit of death. The death of Christ was the only means by which we could have eternal life. The death of a person who was God, was the only way by

which we could come to have life in God.--Here favour is made to arise out of wrath; our acceptance into God's favour out of God's wrath upon his own Son. A blessing rises out of a curse; our everlasting blessedness, from Christ being made a curse for us. Our righteousness is made to rise out of Christ's imputed guilt. He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God. 2 Cor. V:21. By such wonderful means hath the wisdom of God procured our salvation.²⁶

Of utmost importance to his evangelistic appeal is the fact that he considered God's way of salvation "wonderful."

As to the objective basis of salvation, that is, the activity of God in making salvation available to men, Edwards taught:

Since God in the gospel has revealed that nothing is too hard for him to do, nothing beyond the reach of his power, and wisdom, and sufficiency; and since Christ has wrought out the work of redemption, and fulfilled the law by obeying, there is none of mankind whom he may not save without any prejudice to any of his attributes.²⁷

God is infinitely holy. "The heavens are not pure in his sight."²⁸ He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity. "And if God should in any way countenance sin, and should not give proper testimonies of his hatred of it, and displeasure at it, it would be

²⁶ Edwards, "The Wisdom of God, Displayed in the Way of Salvation," Works, op. cit., II, 150.

²⁷ Edwards, "God's Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men," Works, op. cit., II, 850.

²⁸ Ibid.

a prejudice to the honour of his holiness."²⁹ Nevertheless:

God can save the greatest sinner without giving the least countenance to sin . . . because his abhorrence of it and displeasure against it have been already sufficiently manifested in the sufferings of Christ . . . in which sin is punished fully, and justice answered.³⁰

Vergilius Ferm says that according to Calvin, "God imputes Christ's perfection to a chosen few, thus giving to them the status of his Son. God accepts his Son's payment for a debt owed."³¹ Edwards' reason for believing in the necessity of the atonement was expressed in somewhat different terms than this typical interpretation of Calvinism. As quoted above, Edwards taught that for God simply to overlook sin would be to mar his own character and make him something less than a perfectly holy God; but the sufferings of Christ were a full expression of his aversion to sin and an adequate punishment for sin, so that God can now offer salvation to sinners without lowering his standards. Edwards was Calvinistic, and his statement quoted above and that of Ferm mean basically the same thing; but, there is a difference of expression, and with that a difference in the effect

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 851.

³¹ Vergilius Ferm, Puritan Sage, Collected Writings of Jonathan Edwards (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), p. xix.

produced upon the reader or listener. Such subtle differences in viewpoint and delicacy of expression brought new vitality to a system of theology that had reached a low ebb of woodenness, and helped to make Edwards' preaching appealing.

A present-day reader of Edwards' works might wonder why he felt it necessary to lay such emphasis upon the threatnings of the law being fulfilled, the punishment of sin being executed, and God's justice being satisfied. Does not this, one might ask, place the Law above God himself? If God is Sovereign, can he not forgive freely, without any consideration of the demands of the law being met or of justice being satisfied? To this Edwards would answer, it is not that there is some impersonal law higher than God and binding upon him, but rather that for God to condone sin would be to violate his own character.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism speaks of Christ as offering up himself "a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice."³² Augustine records in his Confessions that he was frightened with his sins and the burden of his misery and "cast in his heart and purposed to flee to the wilderness," but that God forbid him and strengthened him, saying, "Therefore Christ died for all." Augustine found comfort in the echo from his heart, "He Thine only Son . . . hath

³² The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 25.

redeemed me with His blood."³³ Karl Barth sounds a similar note:

So great is the ruin of the creature that less than the self-surrender of God would not suffice for its rescue. . . . The forgiveness of sins rests on the fact that this dying took place at that time on Golgotha. Baptism tells you that that death was also your death.³⁴

D. M. Baillie stresses man's need of divine forgiveness and the fact that forgiveness must rest upon atonement. "Is there no difference," he asks, "between a good-natured indulgence and a costly reconciliation?"³⁵ The very fact that God loves us makes it impossible for him to say, "I do not care," when we sin. Forgiveness is free to us, but costly to God, he himself bearing the brunt and paying the price.

The reason that some theologians have discounted the need for atonement, Baillie suggests, is that others have advanced "falsely crude and sub-Christian theories" concerning it and brought on a violent reaction against the doctrine.

Was Jonathan Edwards' conception of God's activity in the salvation of men crude or sub-Christian? Many would

³³ Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, op. cit., p. 272.

³⁴ Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1949), pp. 116, 151.

³⁵ D. M. Baillie, op. cit., p. 172.

suppose so when the subject is first mentioned, because he is so widely known as a "hell-fire preacher." Very damaging to his reputation are those preachers who have attempted to follow his type of evangelism and have failed to do so except in some semblance of mechanics, having lacked the largeness of vision, the passion of love, and the awesome reverence for God that kept Edwards from being woodenly mechanical. Edwards has not been remembered through the years and is not being studied with active interest today merely because of falsely crude and sub-Christian theories. The atonement for sin, through the sufferings of Christ, fitted naturally into his theology, built as it was around the central theme of the sovereignty of God, as the only way in which God could forgive guilty people without clouding the brilliance of his perfect holiness.

Justification by Faith Alone

As man was utterly dependent upon God for the provision of a way by which sinful man might be saved--that way being the atonement--so also he is dependent upon God for the application of that salvation. The pertinence of this phase of Edwards' preaching to his evangelistic efforts is evidenced by the fact that just before the revival of 1734-35 he preached a series of two sermons on the subject of Justification by Faith Alone, which he felt was used of

God to bring about the revival. These two sermons were later expanded and published under the same title in 1738.

In prefacing the published, expanded version of the sermons, Edwards wrote: "The beginning of the late work of God in this place was so circumstanced, that I could not but look upon it as a remarkable testimony of God's approbation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone."³⁶ He also indicated that it was a doctrine that his hearers had been taught from their youth, but that shortly before the revival broke out the doctrine had been questioned in the county and that when he began to preach it he received some "very open abuse" for it; but that just as opposition began to arise "God's work wonderfully brake forth amongst us, and souls began to flock to Christ," which events led him to the conclusion that "this was the doctrine on which this work in its beginning was founded, as it evidently was in the whole progress of it."³⁷

The opposition of which he spoke came from those influenced by Arminianism, which was, basically, a revolt against the so-called harsh tenets of Calvinism. Paul

³⁶ Edwards, "Five Discourses on Important Subjects," Works, op. cit., II, 620.

³⁷ Ibid.

Ramsey, Professor of religion at Princeton University, in his introduction to the 1957 edition of Edwards' treatise on the Freedom of the Will, gives an excellent summary of the connotations of the term "Arminian" as applied to eighteenth century New England. Originally it was an objection to the Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible grace. Arminians acknowledged the necessity of the grace of God and the doctrine of salvation by grace but stressed the possibility of man's resisting that grace, which

opened the way to an increasing emphasis upon the ethical and the human among later Arminians. This passed over easily into Pelagianism, which dwells more upon the example of Christ than upon his atoneing work, and into deism or natural religion, in which the ethical and the human gain complete ascendancy.³⁸

"Thus 'Arminianism' became a loose term," continues Ramsey, and "in the eighteenth century there was probably more in common between Edwards' defense of orthodoxy and the restored Arminianism of Arminius, which emerged with new strength and warmth in the Wesleyan revival, than between the latter and some of the 'Arminians' whom Edwards opposed."³⁹

Ramsey's assessment of the type of Arminianism that Edwards opposed is supported by Edwards' description of

³⁸ Paul Ramsey (ed.), Jonathan Edwards, Freedom of the Will (Vol. I of The Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. Perry Miller. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 3.

³⁹ Ibid.

their doctrine:

Let the Arminian scheme of justification by our own virtue be as plain and natural as it will, if at the same time it is plainly contrary to the certain and demonstrable doctrine of the gospel, as contained in the Scriptures, we are bound to reject it.⁴⁰

The sermons that occasioned the first revival were, then, a reassertion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, in opposition to that of justification by human virtue. This doctrine coupled naturally with Edwards' doctrine of the atonement to emphasize man's complete dependence upon God for salvation.

It is noteworthy in studying these sermons that they were later reworked for publication, and therefore correctly reflect Edwards' considered views on the vital matter of justification. Doubtless they remain in substance the same as preached, although expanded and amplified. They were prepared particularly for and at the request of those who had heard them when first delivered and who desired them in the hope that their first experience might be renewed and confirmed. The meaning of saving faith, as preached in these sermons, is essentially the same as that expressed in a series of Miscellaneous Remarks which Edwards, over a period of time, wrote down concerning various subjects,

⁴⁰ Edwards, "Five Discourses on Important Subjects," Works, op. cit., II, 621.

including faith.

The miscellaneous remarks on faith begin with the simple statement that faith is "a belief of a testimony,"⁴¹ adding that it is a belief of truth from a "sense of [its] glory and excellency, or at least with such a sense." (The word "sense" will be discussed in a later chapter dealing with Edwards' view of the experience of conversion. It appears time and again in his sermons and other writings, and is germane to his thought and especially to his theory of evangelism, because he endeavored continually to enable men to sense with their hearts the things of which the gospel speaks. Faith is accepting Christ, and that acceptance should be from a sense of the excellency of Christ, not simply from an awareness of the good that he can do for the person accepting him.) Its object is the gospel, as well as Jesus Christ. It is receiving Christ into the heart, and includes more than mere belief, being spoken of in Scripture as obeying the gospel. It is a matter of committing oneself to Christ. It is both intellectual and emotional, being both "belief of the truth, and an answerable disposition of heart."⁴² That answerable

⁴¹ Edwards, "Miscellaneous Remarks," Works, op. cit., II, 578.

⁴² Ibid., p. 588.

disposition is love, and love belongs to the essence of saving faith. "The best, and clearest, and most perfect definition of justifying faith," said Edwards, "is this, faith is the soul's entirely embracing the revelation of Jesus Christ as our Saviour."⁴³ But the word "embrace" is metaphorical, and Edwards complained that the difficulty in giving a definition of faith is that we have no word that clearly and adequately expresses "the whole act of acceptance, or closing of the soul or heart with Christ."⁴⁴

The word "faith," therefore, as Edwards used it, meant much more than an intellectual assent and consisted in an acceptance of Christ, which included the proper attitude of love for him.

The two sermons referred to above, which marked the beginning of the awakening, emphasized that salvation is "by faith in Christ, and not by any manner of virtue or goodness of our own." By justification he meant not only the remission of sins but the imputation of a positive righteousness. "More is needful than not having the guilt of sin . . . a believer's justification implies not only remission of sins, or acquittance from the wrath due to it, but also an admittance to a title to that glory which is

⁴³ Ibid., p. 580.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 582.

the reward of righteousness."⁴⁵ By being justified by faith he meant that faith in Christ is that which renders it a "meet and suitable thing, in the sight of God, that the believer, rather than others, should have this purchased benefit assigned to him."⁴⁶ Faith does not save, but Christ does, faith being the quality in a person which makes it a suitable thing for Christ to save him.

Justification by faith did not mean to Edwards that faith is a virtue or good work. As such it could no more deserve salvation than any other virtue or good work, and the Scriptures teach plainly that justification does not come by the works of the law. The efficacy of faith consists solely in the fact that it unites the believer with Christ.

It is not, in any wise, on account of any excellency of value that there is in faith, that it appears in the sight of God a meet thing, that he who believes should have this benefit of Christ assigned to him, but purely from the relation faith has to the person in whom this benefit is to be had, or as it unites to that mediator, in and by whom we are justified.⁴⁷

To use Edwards' illustration, "When a man offers himself to a woman in marriage, he does not give himself to her as a

⁴⁵ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," Works, op. cit., I, 623.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 624.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

reward of her receiving him in marriage. Her receiving him is not considered as a worthy deed in her . . . but it is by her receiving him that the union is made It is on her part the union itself."⁴⁸

Faith, then, justifies in that it unites one to Christ and makes it proper that God should look upon the believer as "in Christ," and therefore having an imputed righteousness consisting both in the removal of guilt through Christ's sacrifice and the bestowal of a positive goodness through Christ's obedience.

This faith is not a shallow or light thing. It includes, in principle, all the acts of the Christian life, which are indeed simply expressions of faith. Therefore, when the Scriptures speak of salvation being promised to those who obey, nothing more is meant than that obedience is a sign of faith. For instance, a paper proving citizenship in a country entitles the holder to the privileges of citizenship, not because of any real value in the document but because of the actual citizenship of which the paper is simply an evidence.⁴⁹ While a sinner is "actually and finally justified as soon as he has performed one act of faith . . . yet the perseverance of faith, even then,

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 640.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 643.

comes into consideration, as one thing on which the fitness of acceptance to life depends."⁵⁰ Perseverance was looked upon as being virtually contained in the first act of faith, because it is one of the things for which the sinner trusts God, and one of the benefits to which faith entitles him. God looks upon the believer's continuance in faith "as though it already were, because by divine establishment it shall follow."⁵¹ The faith that saves is not barren, because it unites the person with Christ, who is the ultimate of all Christian graces and who will produce them in the life of the believer.

This doctrine was advanced against the views of what Edwards called "modern divines," whose teachings were Arminian in the sense of basing justification upon an individual's virtue or good works. Those holding such views reasoned that, since the fall, our impotence makes it impossible for us to attain the perfection originally required by the law and that God would be unjust to require more of us than we are able to perform, so that now his requirements are a sincere although imperfect obedience. They taught that faith justifies as a principle of obedience, or as the sum total of all evangelical obedience. To

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 640.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 641.

Edwards, faith itself was not a good work, and Christ did not give himself to a person as a reward for his having faith; but faith was the condition of salvation in the sense that it was the uniting of the believer to Christ (as in the marriage illustration). The distinction may appear to some to be a matter of making much of a slight variation, but Edwards felt very strongly that it made all the difference between giving God the glory for man's salvation and giving that glory to man. He insisted that God be given all the glory.

Up to this point, most thoughtful Christians are able to follow Edwards in his presentation of the way of salvation without taking exception to the trend of his argument. Certainly the atonement is central in the scheme of salvation, and certainly faith plays the key roll in the acceptance of salvation. The main stream of Protestant thought has always maintained that salvation is by faith, not by works. Paul's words on the subject are well known, as are Martin Luther's. An important present-day theologian gives fresh expression to the doctrine:

All that we were and achieved will be subject to the judgment that it was sin. And sin means transgression, deviation. And if there was something else, it was always the thing that came from above, of which we have no cause to boast, even though it be the mercy of God. Every day we ought to begin, we may begin with the confession: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."
... "You are justified." For Me you are no longer

the sinner, but where you are there stands Another.⁵²

Salvation based upon the atonement and received by faith takes into account the traditional teachings of Protestantism and gives credit for man's salvation to God.

The question that next arises is, "Whence is the faith by which men are united to Christ?" Is it an act of man's free choice, or is it a gift of God, or, in some mysterious way, is it both? Here is the point at which some of Edwards' sermons offend the sensitivity of many sincere Christians, for he attributes the influences that induce faith in Christ to the discriminating grace of God--that is, grace shown irresistibly to some and not to others. Professor John Baillie, Principal of New College, Edinburgh, said: "The one thing that I cannot tolerate is a crude predestinarianism coupled with a doctrine of eternal punishment."⁵³ A view which would destroy human responsibility and make God utterly arbitrary would ill consist with God's justice, and much less with his love.

Two things must be said, in this connection, about Edwards' preaching. The first is that he believed and preached both eternal punishment and the complete sover-

⁵² Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, op. cit., pp. 150-151.

⁵³ Statement by John Baillie, classroom lecture, 1952.

eighty of God over the eternal destiny of the souls of men. The second is that he made a surprising use of this combination of doctrines.

Concerning the first of these observations, a section on the plight of the lost has already brought out his doctrine of eternal punishment, and a chapter on the sovereignty of God has brought out his mighty emphasis upon that doctrine. Nevertheless, in the above-mentioned sermons on justification by faith he did not go behind the act of faith to discuss whether it was to be initiated by the individual or by God. Instead, he urged an act of faith upon his hearers as one who believed they should and could choose. In forming the union between a person and Christ, there should be, he said, "the mutual act of both, that each should receive other, as actively joining themselves one to another."⁵⁴ An individual thus "actively joining" would be more than a pawn in the hand of God.

Edwards made his recognition of an ability to choose more explicit when he said, in the same paragraph, "God, in requiring this in order to an union with Christ as one of his people, treats men as reasonable creatures, capable of act and choice; and hence sees it fit that they only who

⁵⁴ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," Works, op. cit., I, 626.

are one with Christ by their own act, should be looked upon as one in law." In these statements he was not being inconsistent with his own views as expressed elsewhere, but was expressing what he believed and taught; namely, that "there is no way for the will to determine an act than by willing and choosing it. . . . Obviously a man has the power to will as he does will. What he wills, he wills. . . . In this sense a man may choose as he pleases."⁵⁵

Edwards' determinism entered in his discussion of why a man chooses as he does; but responsibility rests in the choice itself, so that a man is praiseworthy or blameworthy in his choices because he has the power to choose what he wills. The fact that he chooses what he does because he is what he is does not lessen responsibility, but rather confirms it. Thus, Edwards preached that men can and do and must choose, even though he believed strongly in the sovereignty of God, even over the souls of men.⁵⁶

Concerning the second observation, the use Edwards made of man's utter dependence upon God, the sermons on Justification are a case in point. In them he did not debate how a person comes to have faith, but defined faith

⁵⁵ Ramsey, op. cit., p. 20.

⁵⁶ Edwards, "The Sovereignty of God in the Salvation of Men," Works, op. cit., II, 849.

as a turning to Christ (actually equating it with repentance or considering it as including repentance), and urged his listeners to exercise faith by coming to Christ.⁵⁷

However determinism, or belief in the complete sovereignty of God, or predestination, might seem theoretically to cut the nerve of evangelism, in actuality it did not weaken

Edwards in his desire to win converts. He believed that God ordained the means as well as the outcome, and felt in duty bound to make the best possible use of means to persuade his hearers. Another case in point is his sermon on "The Sovereignty of God in the Salvation of Men," already cited, in which he made use of man's dependence upon God as an incentive to evangelism. After pressing God's sovereignty to the ultimate, he made this application of the doctrine: "It will be as a sovereign God pleases, whether you shall obtain it [salvation] or not. Seeing, therefore, that in this affair you are so absolutely dependent on God, it is best to follow his direction in seeking it, which is to hear his voice to-day: 'To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.'"

An effort has been made in this section to describe and illustrate Edwards' view of the plan of salvation in

⁵⁷ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," Works, op. cit., I, 647.

respect to man's utter dependence upon the activity of God in providing the atonement and in applying it through faith alone. Another aspect of his conception of the plan of salvation is that which led him to urge men to take great pains in their endeavors and in their search for salvation.

II. MAN'S ACTIVITY IN SALVATION

This aspect of his preaching, and its relationship to that which has gone before in this chapter, is illustrated in the example of Noah, already cited, in which Edwards said that Noah was saved by the free grace of God but that he was also saved by his own works--that is, the building of the ark. Salvation is only by the mercy of God, yet he bestows it upon those who seek it.

For this reason Edwards preached such sermons as those entitled "The Manner of Seeking Salvation," and "Pressing into the Kingdom of God," in which are startling statements about works as basic to salvation, to be coming from the preacher who laid such stress upon God's sovereignty over human destiny and salvation being by faith alone. Some undoubtedly feel, with Charles Brown, that Edwards was inconsistent in preaching both, they being contradictory;⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Charles Reynolds Brown, "Jonathan Edwards," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1945 ed.), VIII, 20.

but Edwards would not consider himself inconsistent, because he was convinced that God uses means to accomplish his purposes; and preaching and earnest endeavor are among those means.

The first-mentioned sermon was preached at Northampton in September, 1740, in the midst of the second period of awakening. It provides an example of his exhortations to strenuous endeavor in order to salvation and gives a context by which one can understand why he felt justified in preaching such sermons in conjunction with those proclaiming man's utter dependence upon God. Several direct quotations give the gist of his thought:

We must indeed be saved on the account of works; but not our own. It is on account of the works which Christ hath done for us.

.....

Though it be not needful that we do any thing to merit salvation, which Christ hath fully merited for all who believe in him; yet God, for wise and holy ends, hath appointed, that we should come to final salvation in no other way, but that of good works done by us.

.....

Although the work of obedience performed by men, be not necessary in order to merit salvation; yet it is necessary in order to their being prepared for it. Men cannot be prepared for salvation without seeking it in such a way as hath been described. This is necessary in order that they have a proper sense of their own necessities, and unworthiness; and in order that they be prepared and disposed to prize salvation when bestowed, and be properly thankful to God for it. The requisition of so great a work in order to our

salvation is no way inconsistent with the freedom of the offer of salvation; as after all, it is both offered and bestowed without any respect to our work, as the price or meritorious cause of our salvation.⁵⁹

In other words, "Men have no reason to expect to be saved in idleness, or to go to heaven in a way of doing nothing. . . . If we would be saved, we must seek salvation. For although men do not obtain heaven of themselves, yet they do not go thither accidentally, or without any intention or endeavours of their own."⁶⁰ The work man has to do is "a diligent use of all the appointed means of grace." "God has appointed such earnest seeking, to be the way in which he will bestow the kingdom of heaven."⁶¹

Although men are dependent upon God for their conversion, they nevertheless have the duty of seeking that salvation as the "one thing they do" and of making use of all the means that God has placed at their disposal, in order to prepare them for conversion. They cannot expect God to give them faith if they are negligent and careless and if they do not subject themselves to the awakening influences of the Scripture and of preaching and of earnest

⁵⁹ Edwards, "The Manner of Seeking Salvation," Works, op. cit., II, 53.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶¹ Edwards, "Pressing into the Kingdom of God," Works, op. cit., I, 657.

thought and consideration of revealed truth.

Seeking salvation is necessary to prepare a person for the kingdom of God. "Such earnestness and thoroughness of endeavours, is the ordinary means that God makes use of to bring persons to an acquaintance with themselves, to a sight of their own hearts, to a sense of their own helplessness, and to a despair in their own strength and righteousness."⁶² The very seeking of salvation accomplishes the purpose of making a person conscious of his own sinfulness and inadequacy and prepares him to accept salvation by faith in Christ.

His own efforts, of course, are not perfect and cannot save him, but God uses them as means to prepare him to accept God's gift.

Though earnestness of mind be not immediately in your power, yet the consideration of what has been now said of the need of it, may be a means of stirring you up to it. It is true, persons never will be thoroughly engaged in this business, unless it be by God's influence; but God influences persons by means.

.....

Though strong desires and resolutions of mind be not in your power, yet painfulness of endeavours is in your power. It is in your power to take pains in the use of means, yea very great pains. You can be very painful and diligent in watching your own heart, and striving against sin. . . and it is in your power, with great diligence to attend the matter of your duty towards God

⁶² Ibid.

and towards your neighbour. It is in your power to attend all ordinances, and all public and private duties of religion, and to do it with your might. It would be a contradiction to suppose that a man cannot do these things with all the might he has, though he cannot do them with more might than he has.⁶³

The "great pains" about which Edwards spoke were meant quite literally. The awakenings fostered a pattern of great agitation about the miseries of being lost, followed, in the case of those who were deemed converted, by a similarly great exultation in the glory and mercy of God.

These "pains" were encouraged by particularized warnings against neglecting God's way of salvation. Those who were unconcerned about their salvation were told plainly that they were showing contempt for God and implying that God acted foolishly in going to such lengths and making such sacrifice for their salvation when they did not need it. They think he might have "spared his cost." Likewise accused of contempt for God were those who substituted for God's way of salvation by faith in Christ a way of their own contriving, hoping to be saved by their good works. Those who entertained "discouraged and despairing apprehensions" about their salvation were told that such misgivings reflected contempt for God, as though he "had not found out a way that was sufficient for the salvation of

⁶³ Ibid.

great sinners."⁶⁴ The awfulness of unbelief, they were told, is that it implies a rejecting and despising of divine wisdom in the way of salvation by Jesus Christ.

In summary, Edwards believed and preached that men are utterly dependent upon God for salvation because salvation would have been impossible had not God provided for it through the atoning work of Christ, because salvation is by faith alone, and because faith is a gift of God's mercy. On the other hand, he preached that men are responsible to God and that it is their duty earnestly to seek salvation.

Is it possible to teach both without being guilty of a basic inconsistency? Arminians object that if God determines the eternal destiny of men, men simply cannot be held responsible. Calvinists maintain that God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are both realities, to be believed and acted upon even though not fully explicable. Edwards was content to be called a Calvinist, although he made it clear that he was not dependent upon Calvin.

Calvin posed the question, in a sermon on "The Salvation of All Men":

And now, why doth God choose one, and leave another?
We know that men cannot come to God by their own deserts,

⁶⁴ Edwards, "The Wisdom of God Displayed in the Way of Salvation," Works, op. cit., II, 154.

neither are those who have been chosen deserving any such thing as to be preferred to their companions, as though there were some worthiness in them. It followeth then that before the world was made (as St. Paul saith in the first to the Ephesians), God chose such as pleased Him: and we know not why this man was chosen in preference to that. And still we must confess that whatsoever God doth is done justly, although we cannot comprehend it. Therefore, let us receive that whereof we are so thoroughly certified in Holy Writ; and not suffer ourselves to be led astray, under a shadow of vain reason, used by men, who are ignorant of the Word of God.⁶⁵

Edwards undertook an explanation of the problem (which Calvin said "we cannot comprehend") by defining freedom as the ability to choose what one wills (which freedom man definitely has and which freedom makes him responsible), while at the same time maintaining that what a person wills depends ultimately upon divine determination. The argument as it is worked out involves the long treatise on the Freedom of the Will.

Other writers have recognized that Edwards had some grounds for his argument. Bertrand Russell wrote, "Praise and blame, reward and punishment, and the whole apparatus of the criminal law, are rational on the deterministic hypothesis, but not on the hypothesis of free will."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ John Calvin, "The Salvation of All Men," The Mystery of Godliness (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 100.

⁶⁶ Bertrand Russell, Human Society in Ethics and Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 79.

Says Austin E. Duncan-Jones:

If the particular decision that I make, within a certain range, is not determined, then my previous life might have had the precise character that it actually had and I might none the less have made a different decision: I am therefore not responsible for having made this precise decision. And so on. A fortiori, unrestricted indifference is inconsistent with responsibility.⁶⁷

Martin Luther, in The Bondage of the Will, wrote: "For Will, whether divine or human, does what it does, be it good or evil, not by any compulsion, but by mere willingness or desire, as it were totally free. Yet God's immutable will rules over all."⁶⁸

In urging that men seek salvation by faith alone, Edwards was not encouraging them to neglect righteous living. The two belong together, as Paterson says:

If the doctrine of justification by faith were not a revealed truth it would still rank as an intuition of spiritual genius, for in solving the capital religious problem it concurrently solves the capital moral problem of the human lot. . . . When the sinner seeks first the divine favor and pardon, righteousness will be added unto him. He is like unto a man digging for hid treasure, who has the double reward of unearthing the treasure and fertilizing his field.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Bertrand Russell, "Freedom: an Illustrative Puzzle," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, XXXIX (1938-39), 30.

⁶⁸ Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1931), p. x.

⁶⁹ W. P. Paterson, Conversion (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), pp. 100-1.

Edwards proclaimed both the sovereignty of God in salvation and man's responsibility earnestly to seek salvation, with no thought of being inconsistent.

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CHAPTER V

THE EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION

The subject matter of this chapter is closely related to that of the last and in a sense belongs with it, except that its importance warrants a separate discussion. Under the heading of "The Way of Salvation" were examined the doctrines which were preached in order to advise men how they might be saved--through the atonement, by faith alone, after seeking with all their hearts. The subject of this chapter is the actual conversion experience, or that at which Edwards was aiming in his evangelistic sermons.

This subject is viewed first from the standpoint of what had been generally accepted among Puritans as a desired experience; then from the standpoint of the changes brought about by the Great Awakening in the type of experience that people desired, and what part Edwards had in those changes. Of primary interest is that which was involved in what Edwards called a true conversion experience.

I. THE PURITAN VIEW OF CONVERSION

Secular historians have pictured Puritans all too often as a strange, "straight-laced," cold and often cruel society of people, peculiar in dress and custom. The adjective "puritanical" has most unpleasant connotations.

As William Warren Sweet says, "The great vogue which the economic interpretation of history has had these past forty years and more has been particularly hard on the Puritans. In fact, for many historians of the last generation any stick has been good enough with which to beat the Puritans."¹ "Yet," he continues, "any attempt to interpret from a purely economic angle what happened in New England in the seventeenth century is bound to misunderstand, if it does not miss entirely, the basic element in early New England history." One does not see the whole truth, by any means, when he looks only upon outward peculiarities. Perry Miller is complimentary of the Puritans: "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries certain men of decisive character took religion seriously . . . they often followed spiritual dictates in comparative disregard to all ulterior considerations."²

Miller sees Puritanism, not as a unique phenomenon peculiar to New England or to England of the seventeenth century, but as "one more instance of a recurrent spiritual answer to interrogations eternally posed by human exist-

¹ William Warren Sweet, Religion in Colonial America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 73.

² Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), foreword.

ence."³ He recognizes its connection with Calvin, but traces it back with even stronger ties to Augustine, as an expression of the basic type of Christian experience that belonged to Augustine and that formed the pivotal point of his writings. "In the writings of the Puritans we shall find the turn of mind and sense of values, even sometimes the very accent, of Augustine. There survive hundreds of Puritan diaries and thousands of Puritan sermons, but we can read the inward meaning of them all in the Confessions."⁴

Puritan theology was an effort to externalize and systematize this subjective mood. Piety was the inspiration for Puritan heroism. . . . It was something that men either had or had not, it could not be taught or acquired. It was foolishness and fanaticism to their opponents, but to themselves it was life eternal. Surely most of the first settlers in New England had it; in later generations most of those who did not have it pretended to it. It blazed most clearly and most fiercely in the person of Jonathan Edwards.⁵

The type of conversion experience which was desired by Puritans was the individualistic, definite, inward transformation which Augustine experienced and about which he wrote in his Confessions. Before his conversion, he had this knowledge of how it should be: "Cast thyself upon Him,

³ Perry Miller, The New England Mind, The Seventeenth Century (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 4.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵ Ibid.

fear not, He will not withdraw Himself that thou shouldest fall; cast thyself fearlessly upon Him, He will receive, and will heal thee." The moment of his conversion he describes thus: "for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away."⁶

In the early days of the Colonies, a satisfactory testimony to such an experience was required as a condition of membership in the New England churches, the testimony being made publicly before the congregation. As time passed and succeeding generations became farther removed from the rigorous circumstances of their fathers and more engrossed in accumulating possessions, it became increasingly difficult to maintain congregations of those who were able and willing to make such a positive statement of their faith. The ministry, while it continued to prepare laboriously, failed in many cases to hold their listeners' interest in the long, logical, argumentative sermons. The percentage of actual church members in the New England Colonies had always been relatively small because of the strict requirements, and as religious interest declined over the decades conditions developed which led to the

⁶ St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. E. B. Pusey (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1950), pp. 186-7.

adoption of the half-way covenant. This meant a separation in the membership of churches between those who had professed conversion and those who could not affirm a personal conversion experience but who were willing to "own the covenant," or give an intellectual assent to the truth of it.

Shortly before Edwards came upon the scene, Stoddard began admitting the unconverted to the Lord's Supper, on the grounds that it was a means of grace and should help them toward a spiritual experience, and his practice was adopted by many other churches.

All this did not mean that Puritanism in Edwards' day had departed in theory from the ideal of a definite conversion experience reminiscent of Augustine's, but that it was failing to secure many such conversions. Sermons of New England ministers in the latter part of the seventeenth century and early part of the eighteenth were full of gloomy forebodings as to the future because of the low state of religion and morals. "O what a sad metamorphosis hath of later years passed upon us in these churches and plantations! Alas! How is New England in danger to be buried in its own ruins," lamented William Stoughton before the Massachusetts Legislature in 1668. Ten years later Increase Mather said, "Clear, sound conversions are not frequent. Many of the rising generation are profane Drunkards,

Swearers, Licentious and scoffers at the power of Godliness." Still later Samuel Whitman of Connecticut observed that his generation had "in great measure forgot the errand of our Fathers."⁷

II. CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE GREAT AWAKENING

The Great Awakening did not bring a basic change in the ideal of conversion, but it did lay great stress upon the absolute necessity of having a conversion experience and succeeded in large measure in getting the general populace to feel the urgency of it. Speaking particularly of Edwards' revival sermons, Sweet says: "Though these discourses were doctrinal and the language used the familiar Calvinistic idiom, the preacher's way of presenting the time-honored themes caused the members of his congregation to feel singled out."⁸ Awakening sermons were aimed directly at the individual, and successful ones made the people in the pews feel personally involved. Methods used in the revivals made the soul's situation, either in God's favor or out of it, vividly real to the consciousness, and emotions were stirred, sometimes to a feverish pitch.

⁷ Sweet, op. cit., p. 273.

⁸ Ibid., p. 283.

Under these circumstances unfortunate incidents sometimes occurred, ranging even to attempted suicide. In May of 1743, shortly after the second revival at Northampton, thirty-eight New England ministers who were opposed to the course of the revival in New England drew up a testimony in which they accused the revival of fostering such errors as: "secret impulses upon the mind without due regard to the written word"; "none are converted but such as know they are converted and the time when"; "assurance is of the essence of saving faith"; and "sanctification is no evidence of justification."⁹ One hundred thirteen ministers of the same area who favored the revival promptly endorsed a statement acknowledging that "many irregularities and extravagances have been permitted," yet claiming that a great work of God was being done. The leaders of the revival did not intend to change basically the traditional doctrine of conversion, and a distinction must be made between their aims and general accomplishments, and abuses and excesses that they themselves lamented.

Generally, the people had a greater desire for a conversion experience as the revivals advanced, and there was a tendency to desire a dramatic experience. It was

⁹ Ibid., p. 289.

intensely personal, as contrasted with the expectation in parts of the Old World, especially the parts least affected by the Reformation, where "for the great majority of people," according to Sweet, "salvation was an institutional matter rather than an individual concern."¹⁰ The individualism was not new with the awakening, but there was a renewed emphasis upon it.

III. EDWARDS' PART IN THE CHANGED EMPHASIS

To what extent may the changes in emphasis or in the ideas about conversion be attributed to Edwards? Generally speaking, he has been considered the spokesman for the Awakening. Most accounts of the movement begin as does that of Dr. Ben R. Lacey, Jr., ex-President of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, in his Revivals in the Midst of the Years: "The Great Awakening in the Colonies and the Wesleyan Revival in Great Britain began almost simultaneously. In 1734, the year after Oglethorpe's first settlement in Georgia, Northampton, Massachusetts, experienced a revival under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards."¹¹ Sweet, on the other hand, referring to the fact

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 272.

¹¹ Ben R. Lacey, Jr., Revivals in the Midst of the Years (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1943), p. 42.

that "Jonathan Edwards has been called the father of the revivalistic type of Protestantism in America," says, "From every point of view this is an erroneous statement."¹² His opinion is based upon what he calls a well-established fact that the revival began first in the Middle Colonies, upon a belief that the urgent need of bringing religion to the masses would have brought an awakening if there had been no Jonathan Edwards, and upon an observation that colonial revivalism was rooted in pietism and not in New England Calvinism and that it was only by "impregnating his Calvinism with pietism" that Edwards' gospel was made effective in reaching the hearts of his people.

Most writers, however, whether or not they view with favor the effects of the Awakening, credit Edwards with a place of prominence in the leadership of it. In an address shortly after the centennial of Edwards' death, Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "Of all the scholars and philosophers that America had produced before the beginning of the present century, two only had established a considerable and permanent reputation in the world of European thought,--Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards."¹³ He

¹² Sweet, op. cit., p. 281.

¹³ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Jonathan Edwards, An Essay," International Review (New York and Chicago: A. S. Barnes & Co., July, 1880), p. 1.

quoted Bancroft on Edwards' influence over later theology: "His influence is discernible on every leading mind. Bellamy and Hopkins were his pupils; Dwight was his expositor; Smalley, Emmons, and many others were his followers; through Hopkins his influence reached Kerkland, and assisted in moulding the character of Channing."¹⁴ In 1929, Benjamin Wisner Bacon told a gathering at the dedication of a memorial gateway to Edwards that "he left behind him a school of New England theology which, whatever their faults and differences, made the religious history of the next century a history of vital religious thought in amazing contrast with the preceding century of blind acceptance of the prescribed doctrines of the Westminster and Savoy Confessions."¹⁵

Dr. Thomas A. Schafer, associate professor of church history at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, says of Edwards: "By his writings and example, he gave impetus to the infant evangelical missionary movement. As Chronicler, preacher, apologist, and critic of the evangelical awakening, he influenced its patterns and practices, helped

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Benjamin Wisner Bacon, "The Theological Significance of Jonathan Edwards," an address given at the dedication of a memorial gateway to Jonathan Edwards at the Old Burying Ground, South Windsor, June, 1929, a copy of which is on file in the Yale University Library.

correct its extravagances, and wedded it to heart worship of God and intense moral earnestness."¹⁶ Lewis Wyatt Lang says that "the scientific study of conversion may be said to have been begun by President Edwards in America during the middle decades of the eighteenth century."¹⁷ Perry Miller writes:

Edwards scientifically, deliberately, committed Puritanism, which had been a fervent rationalism of the covenant, to a pure passion of the senses, and the terror of insecurity. He overthrew the kind of religious philosophy that had dominated Western Europe since the fall of Rome, the system wherein there was always--whether in terms of the City of God, or of the Mass and absolution, or of final causes and substantial forms, or, at the last, in terms of the Puritan covenant--an ascertainable basis for human safety. Now there was none. . . .

By supplying a vehicle which ignorance and crudity soon adopted, Edwards wrought incalculable harm, though we must remember that the main current of American revivalism flows from Whitefield and the Methodists rather than from him, and that among revivalists he is a peculiar figure.¹⁸

It is evident that preaching at the time of the Awakening "used the familiar Calvinistic idiom" and the "time-honored themes," not changing basically the ideal

¹⁶ Thomas A. Schafer, "Jonathan Edwards," an article prepared for publication in the next edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica, p. 7 of the manuscript.

¹⁷ Lewis Wyatt Lang, A Study of Conversion, an Inquiry into the Development of Christian Personality (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931), p. 12.

¹⁸ Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans (New York: American Book Co., 1938), pp. 147-8.

of conversion that had been traditionally Puritan, and indeed Augustinian. It is equally clear that the new way of presenting those themes aroused an intense personal desire for the conversion experience, and set a tone for and standard of evangelism that has had a remarkable influence upon subsequent religious history in America. That much is certain, although opinions vary greatly as to the value or commendability of that influence.

It is also evident that Jonathan Edwards is accepted, with very few dissenting votes, as the outstanding leader of the revival movement. George Whitefield was a more spectacular preacher, but the preaching of Edwards had the flame burning before Whitefield arrived, and Edwards' writings gave a philosophy and a pattern to the movement. One more observation is submitted as tremendously important. Perry Miller was right in saying that "among revivalists he is a peculiar figure." He himself, and his evangelism, must be examined in their own light rather than in the light of perversions and abuses that his imitators brought into the movement. Moreover, a distinction should be made between his goals in evangelism and his imperfect attainments, which he himself lamented.

IV. EDWARDS' CONCEPT OF THE NATURE OF CONVERSION

This section is vital, as it deals with Edwards' basic goal in evangelism, or the nature of the experience to which he sought to lead his listeners. It will involve a discussion of: (1) what he considered to be the steps leading to conversion, (2) the very essence of the experience, and (3) some of the evidences of conversion.

The Steps to Conversion

The first problem is to determine which of the sermons were intended to show the steps to conversion. It is impossible to make anything like a definite distinction between sermons aimed at conversion and those aimed at encouraging the spiritual growth of the already-converted. With Edwards, as with other ministers, objectives were combined, and more than one type of person was addressed in any given sermon. Those who were professing Christians sometimes became cool in their devotion and required the "awakening" sermons ordinarily considered chiefly for the non-Christians. On the other hand, sermons addressed primarily to Christians served to open the eyes of sinners to the standards being set for believers and the horizons of progress in holiness and joy that lay before them.

Richard Baxter, writing in England in 1656, said:

"The work of conversion is the great thing that we must first drive at, and labour with all our might to effect. . . . The next part of the ministerial work, is for the building up of those that are already truly converted: and, according to the various states of these, the work is various."¹⁹

According to Baxter's interpretation of the work of a reformed pastor, conversions were to be sought through the disclosure of the "great mystery of redemption," which included "the person, natures, incarnation, perfection, life, miracles, sufferings, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, glorification, dominion, intercession of the blessed Son of God--as also the tenor of His promises, the conditions imposed on us, the duties which He hath commanded us."²⁰

This is a wide span of subjects, all having to do with evangelism. Dwight L. Moody stated that as time went on he preached more and more with Christians in mind, in his evangelistic efforts, because insistence upon the high standards of the Christian life and public rebuke of the many failings and faults of believers were appreciated by

¹⁹ Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor (London: The Epworth Press, 1656), p. 78.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

the unconverted and gave them a healthy respect for the gospel.

As Edwards preached, there were both Christians and non-Christians before him, and his sermons do not break down easily into categories of those designed to convert and those designed to edify. His ultimate goal in preaching was to bring people to the exceedingly high level of religious experience described in his treatises on the Religious Affections and on the Nature of True Virtue--an experience that expresses itself fundamentally in a genuine love to God. His goal was not sub-divided as distinctly as was Baxter's into winning converts and nurturing them. The ultimate goal for both non-Christian and Christian was an utterly unselfish love to God, and anyone falling short of that needed to be converted.

In other words, there was not in Edwards the tendency that is found in many evangelists to make conversion a minimum experience, beyond which the new Christian may progress at his own option and leisure to greater heights. This fact is vital, and difficult to bear in mind because when one thinks of the evangelistic work of Edwards he is likely to allow his mind to slip into categories often adopted by evangelists and assume that Edwards' evangelism was an attempt to bring men to a minimum experience. Indeed, it was a minimum experience, as Edwards viewed it, but that

minimum was far different from the bare profession of faith that is sometimes sought by evangelists.

Edwards would have agreed with Dawson Bryan that evangelism means much more than a protracted meeting. "Evangelism attempts to bring all men into living, active fellowship with God through Jesus Christ as divine Saviour. . . . It endeavors also to lead them to express their Christian discipleship in every area of human life."²¹

Edwards traveled from place to place as he was invited, and he approved the traveling ministry of Whitefield; but his primary work as an evangelist was in his own pulpit at Northampton, where he strove to win converts during the times of special awakening and to strengthen and confirm them during the months and years following.

Moreover, the standards that he set for judging the validity of a Christian experience make it clear that the conversion at which he aimed was a whole-hearted and soul-pervading experience, needed not only by the obviously unregenerate but also by many who had for years been "at ease in Zion," comfortably assuming that they were Christians. This meant that practically every person in the congregation felt that Edwards' "awakening" sermons were meant for

²¹ Dawson C. Bryan, "Evangelism," Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Lefferts A. Loetscher (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955), I, 406.

him personally. He was not preaching evangelistically to a few unconverted persons, with others simply looking on. By his definition of conversion almost everyone in his audience needed it!

Edwards himself would have difficulty in distinguishing which of his sermons were intended to be evangelistic. Evangelism lies more in the motive and goal of the preacher and the spirit prompting him than in the subject and construction of the sermon. Whatever the subject matter of the sermon, the "application" or "use" of it urged men to make the proper decision or adjustment in their lives, beliefs, or attitudes.

Mention was made in Chapter III of the fact that Edwards' "hell-fire" preaching represented only a fraction of his total ministry, even as it appears in the published works; and these works have for the most part been composed of the more startling sermons. Many of those published were "occasional" sermons, hardly representing his week-to-week ministry.

In the Rare Book Room of Yale University Library rest hundreds of sermons and sermon outlines by Jonathan Edwards that have never been published, and that reveal the nature of his ordinary ministry at Northampton and among the Indians at Stockbridge. The following sampling of texts and subject matter gives a needed insight into the usual tone

of his ministry:

Romans 12:1, On giving ourselves up to God.

Philippians 1:21, On living to Christ.

I Peter 1:15, On being universally holy in our lives.

Revelation 21:18, On the superiority of the glories of Heaven.

Proverbs 24:13-14, On the pleasantness of religion.

Isaiah 3:10, On the good man and his happiness.

Zechariah 4:7, On free and glorious grace.

Matthew 5:3, On the happiness of the poor in spirit.

John 15:5, On Christ the fountain of all spiritual life.

John 6:68, On eternal life through Christ.

James 1:12, On the rewards of loving Christ.

James 1:25, On perfect and glorious liberty in God's service.

I Peter 2:5, On the good works of the Godly being accepted only in and through Christ.²²

Should these be considered, along with the more startling sermons, as a part of Edwards' work as an evangelist? In a broad sense, yes. They were designed to reveal the glorious possibilities of the Christian life, a procedure tending to draw men toward the acceptance of Christ.

²² Jonathan Edwards, "Fifty-Two Early Sermons," a part of the Yale Collection of Unpublished Manuscripts; Rare Book Room, Yale University Library.

In a more restricted sense, the sermons that were intended to "awaken" sinners, both within and without the membership of the church, may be considered as specifically preparing the way for salvation by enabling people to experience an acute sense of their need and of the urgency of the matter. Those which explained the doctrinal basis of salvation were directly evangelistic, as those on Justification by Faith Alone which ushered in the revival.

The following unpublished sermons were preached just before and during the second revival period at Northampton. These are selected from among others preached during that period, as illustrating Edwards' more specifically evangelistic ministry:

Matthew 12:3, Moral duties towards men are a more important and essential part of religion than external acts of the worship of God. January, 1739/40.

John 3:10, 11, There is such a thing as conversion. July, 1740.

Matthew 7:13, 14, On the way to destruction, and that the entrance into eternal life is a straight and narrow passage. (Written on the back of a letter, and delivered at a private meeting.) January, 1740/41.

Matthew 11:12, Persons in seeking heaven should behave in like manner as valiant and resolute soldiers do in taking a country or a kingdom in which they are strongly opposed. February 17, 1740/41.

Luke 18:38, Sinners that meet with opposition and discouragement in their seeking mercy should be as it were wilful and obstinate in it that they will seek mercy. April, 1741.

Luke 19:10, Christ seeking and saving the lost.

June, 1741.

Mark 2:17, What induces Christ to pity and help sinners is not that they deserve it but that they need it. June, 1741.²³

Winslow comments thus upon his design in preaching: "His championship of evangelical doctrine and his zeal for reform in manners are the two discernible causes for the revival in his own parish in 1735. With this precise end in view, he went to work at once with increased enthusiasm in both directions."²⁴

Thus it may be said that practically all of Edwards' preaching was, directly or indirectly, evangelistic, in that it aimed at a complete conversion of the whole person to God.

Edwards believed that there were certain steps along which a person should be led to conversion. He did not feel that a certain order of events was necessary, just so the final conversion be genuine, yet he observed a certain sequence as being the usual way to saving faith:

We do not find any legal convictions, or comforts following these legal convictions, in any certain method or order, ever once mentioned in the Scripture, as certain signs of grace, or things peculiar to the saints; although we do find gracious operations and

²³ Yale University, Edwards MSS.

²⁴ Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 158.

effects themselves so mentioned thousands of times.²⁵

Not the pathway, but the destination, is important; yet the path leads one to the destination.

In bringing the doctrines of salvation to bear upon the lives of his congregation, Edwards had in mind what might be called a normal or typical pattern which he expected their conversion experiences to follow. In his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, he mentioned as being essential to Christianity and as what should be a part of every person's profession of faith, the following: Doctrinally, belief that Jesus is the Messiah, and that Jesus satisfied for our sins. Practically, repentance of sins, faith in Jesus Christ, reliance upon Christ's righteousness and strength, and willingness of heart to embrace religion with all its difficulties.²⁶

In a manuscript that did not find its way into the published works of Edwards, except for three hundred copies which Alexander B. Grosart prepared for private distribution, there appear the notes of a sermon on Romans 5:1, entitled *Peace with God*, and containing what Edwards evidently considered the usual steps to salvation. These notes are brief and to the point:

²⁵ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," *Works*, *op. cit.*, I, 254.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

- V. Course to be taken in order to the obtaining of this peace with God and enjoying the benefits of it.
1. A sense of the great breach.
 2. A sense of their misery by reason of the breach, and the absolute necessity of reconciliation. All false rest must be destroyed. The world. Own righteousness.
 3. A conviction that God may justly refuse ever to be at peace with us.
 4. An eternal divorce of the heart from that which made and which maintains the breach.
 5. The Prince of Peace must be resorted to and embraced.
 6. An high war must be maintained with God's enemies.
 7. The spirit of peace and love must rule in our hearts and lives.²⁷

The pattern was, first, a deep humiliation, to be followed by a forsaking of sin and a full acceptance of Christ and commitment to him, with a resulting consciousness of peace and joy.

Lang, in his Study of Conversion, takes cognizance of Horace Bushnell's statement that a child should grow up as a Christian and never know himself to be otherwise; but he adds:

²⁷ Jonathan Edwards, Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards, of America, ed. Alexander B. Grosart from orig. MSS (Edinburgh: Ballantyne & Co., 1865), p. 199.

We must beware, however, of this smoothing method because it has a dangerous tendency to dispense with a decision-crisis and to . . . enfeeble religious activity by indecision.²⁸

.....

Without decision religion becomes inept.²⁹

Christie gives the following excellent summary of what Edwards considered the sequence in conversion to be:

At the outset the hearer must know his guilt as an actual hater of God. . . . Creatures of such iniquity were useful only in their destruction.

Brought thus to the anguished conviction that God was absolutely just in their condemnation and made completely submissive to divine sovereignty, the hearers passed from depth of terror to a calm acquiescence, with a bare hope of possible divine mercy. Regeneration was a third stage of experience in which the submissive heart felt a disinterested joyful adoration in contemplation of the unmerited mercy that would elect any of a race so fallen and corrupt to eternal felicity. Often Edwards had to persuade the penitents that this admiring awe was in fact the impartation of a supernatural light and evidence of a new heart.³⁰

As is evident from the above sermon on Romans 5:1, Edwards theoretically believed that the conversion experience should follow the pattern outlined. After the 1734-35 revival he wrote down his observations concerning how the

²⁸ Lang, op. cit., p. 254.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 257.

³⁰ Francis A. Christie, "Jonathan Edwards," Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson & Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), VI, 32-33.

experiences actually did develop. Either because he was right in understanding the way in which God was pleased to save men, or because men's experiences followed the pattern because it was tirelessly preached to them, the actual experiences did follow the steps that Edwards had outlined. There was a "vast variety," he wrote, perhaps almost as manifold as the subjects of the operation, and yet in many things there was a "great analogy" in all.³¹ With great care Edwards noted the phenomenon of conversion, almost as though he were entirely detached from the revival in which he was deeply involved. Miller attributes his ability to maintain that detachment to his Lockean psychology.

In the Faithful Narrative, which was published and scattered quickly throughout New England and which had tremendous influence in molding the revival movement, Edwards traced the steps to conversion, the first one being an awakening of the person to his miserable condition as a sinner. Differences in the degrees of distress were very great. "Some have had ten times less trouble of mind than others, in whom yet the issue seems to be the same."³² Commonly the distress was intensified as the person came

³¹ Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative," Works, op. cit., I, 350.

³² Ibid., p. 351.

nearer to conversion, and any indication that the convictions were lessening would fill the inquirer with a new fear that his heart was being hardened. Generally the conviction made the person feel his utter dependence upon the sovereign power and grace of God and his dire need of a Mediator. Ordinarily, as the experience progressed, the sense of guilt settled more upon the inward sins of the heart than upon the outward ones that usually gave the first alarm.

The next step was usually a complete submission to God, often amounting to a willingness to be damned if he should see fit, which submission was accompanied by a calmness of spirit. Following this, again with great variety, the convert, gradually realizing that God was performing a saving work in him, found that his mind was turned toward Christ and his excellencies, or to the gospel and its truths, and delights sometimes followed as intense as were the miseries of the first conviction of sin.

For such experiences, psychological explanations could be offered that would account in part for them and their intensity. Edwards knew this. In fact, he used psychology to serve his purposes, as will be shown later, while at the same time he was sure that, all things considered, the hand of God was in the revival and his grace was bringing conversions. He felt perfectly justified in using every

means within his power to strengthen the impressions on men's minds, believing that in so doing he was paving the way for the Spirit of God.

To his oldest son, Timothy, ill with the small-pox, Edwards wrote in 1753, "You do not deserve salvation; neither is God obliged to bestow it on you. Till you have savingly believed in Christ, all your desires, pains, and prayers lay God under no obligation. But it is your duty not to despair, but to hope in infinite mercy, through a redeemer."³³ In his Narrative, he expressed a strong compulsion, in order to be faithful to his charge, to urge upon his congregation that:

God is under no manner of obligation to show mercy to any natural man, whose heart is not turned to God: and that a man can challenge nothing either in absolute justice, or by free promise, from any thing he does before he has believed on Jesus Christ, or has true repentance begun in him.³⁴

What should be one's evaluation of the steps to conversion as proposed and vigorously used by Edwards? Paterson says that the later Lutheran divines made an intensive study of the psychology of conversion and that they analyzed repentance into "a knowledge of sin, a sense of the divine wrath, agony of conscience, humiliation before God, sincere

³³ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, cxcix.

³⁴ Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative," Works, op. cit., I, 352.

confession and hatred of sin."³⁵ These are very similar to the steps outlined by Edwards. Discussion arose among the early reformers whether the evangelist should bring sinners to repentance by putting them in fear of the wrath of God, or whether they should teach them to love him for his goodness. In a pastoral letter endorsed by Luther, Melancthon instructed ministers to proclaim to men that under the Law, which requires perfect obedience, they stand utterly condemned and that there is a fearful looking for of judgment both in time and in eternity.³⁶ The Reformed Churches adopted the same approach, though emphasizing that there is no true repentance without a real appreciation of the mercy of God in Christ.³⁷ The Presbyterians and English Puritans zealously put the theory into practice, and we find it in full flower in the preaching of Edwards.³⁸

The steps to conversion which Edwards used were not new, but were a part of his Protestant heritage. Yet there was an element of newness in the way he used them, which

³⁵ W. P. Paterson, Conversion (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), p. 105.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. John Allen (seventh American edition; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, n.d.), I, 649-79.

³⁸ Paterson, op. cit., p. 106.

Perry Miller has pinpointed as a scientific committing of Puritanism to a pure passion of the senses and the terror of insecurity. The insecurity lay in the emphasis upon the natural man having no claim upon the mercy of God until after he has believed in Christ. The "passion of the senses" will come into the discussion of the problem of communication, in a subsequent chapter.

The Essence of Conversion

The conversion to which Edwards sought to lead his listeners was, essentially, that which had been his own experience. Winslow correctly observes:

The importance of this experience goes far beyond the changes it wrought in his personal life, for it became the cornerstone of his whole structure of thought, determining the basis not only of his revival preaching, but also of his religious philosophy. He first endeavored to search out the innerness of the experience and to understand it himself; then he endeavored to translate it into doctrine. The task was life-long. One might almost say that out of a personal, emotional experience of his seventeenth year he built a theological system.³⁹

Schafer places a similar emphasis upon the importance of Edwards' own experience, and goes beyond Winslow in interpreting it:

The peculiar dynamic of Edwards' theology came from his own experience of God. He progressed in turn from preoccupation with his own salvation to an intellectual "conviction" of divine sovereignty and thence (in a moment of Scriptural meditation) to a "new sense" of and

³⁹ Winslow, op. cit., p. 75.

"delight" in God's glory revealed in Scripture and nature. This became the center of Edwards' piety: a direct intuitive apprehension of God, in his glory, a sight and taste of Christ's majesty and beauty far beyond all "notional" understanding, immediately imparted to the soul (as the 1734 sermon title puts it) by the "divine and supernatural light." This alone confers worth upon man, and in this consists his salvation. What such a God does must be right; hence Edwards' cosmic optimism. The acceptance and affirmation of God as he is and does, and the love of God simply because he is God, became the positive elements in all Edwards' preaching.⁴⁰

The "experience" to which both of these writers refer is that already mentioned in Chapter II, in which an intellectual conviction of God's sovereignty yielded to a positive delight in God and "a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him."⁴¹

The essence of conversion was, to Edwards, a coming to love God. In Lang's words, conversion would be "a change from what we may call autocentric to theocentric motivation."⁴² In a preface to Joseph Bellamy's volume, True Religion Delineated, or Experimental Religion, Edwards voiced approval of Bellamy's approach, which sets forth love and devotion to God as the heart of true religion, and God's love expressed

⁴⁰ Schafer, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴¹ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lv.

⁴² Lang, op. cit., p. 44.

in Christ as the sinner's only hope.⁴³ Conversion might truly be said to include many things, and Edwards also approved a discourse by William Williams naming the following things "wherein true conversion consists": (1) In "turning men from darkness to light;" (2) In "turning men from Sin and Satan unto God;" (3) In "being brought off from self-dependence to a dependence upon Christ for Pardon and Acceptance with God;" (4) In "Taking off the heart from inordinant Love to the present World, and setting it upon God and Christ, and the things that are above;" (5) In the "bringing of Men into some participation of the divine Nature."⁴⁴

Statement four above is the very heart of the matter. Love to God is the essence of virtue. In a long essay, Edwards described true virtue as "benevolence to being in general"; that is, necessarily, to intelligent being, and

⁴³ Joseph Bellamy, True Religion Delineated, or Experimental Religion (Boston: reprinted by Henry P. Russell, 1804), preface.

⁴⁴ William Williams, "The Duty and Interest of a People among whom Religion has been planted, to continue steadfast and Sincere in the Profession and Practice of it, from generation to generation. With directions for such as are concerned to obtain a true Repentance and conversion to God," . . . Preach'd at a Time of General Awakenings, by William Williams, M.A., Pastor of the church in Hatfield. To which is added Part of a large Letter from the Rev. Mr. Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, Giving an Account of the late wonderful work of God in those parts (Boston: Printed and sold by S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1736), pp. 12-17.

especially to Divine Being, since He is the "being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best."⁴⁵

In Theology Today, Joseph G. Haroutunian published an article entitled "Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Great Commandment," in which he says:

Confronted with the universe and its endless marvels, Edwards became convinced that the Creator is worthy of man's constant and wholehearted attention. It was for him the essence of rationality that the man should recognize the great Being as infinitely more "worthy of esteem and honor" than all beings in heaven or on earth.⁴⁶

This love is fostered by "a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God."⁴⁷ The "true sense" of such excellency is possible only through the medium of "a divine and supernatural light, immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God," a spiritual light that is different from any that may be obtained by natural means. Edwards taught that a supernatural act of the Spirit of God is what finally enables a person to appreciate God's excellency and love him. Yet he made it clear

⁴⁵ Edwards, "Dissertation Concerning the Nature of True Virtue," Works, op. cit., I, 122-23.

⁴⁶ Joseph G. Haroutunian, "Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Great Commandment," Theology Today, I, (October, 1944), p. 363.

⁴⁷ Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine," Works, op. cit., II, 14.

in more than one place in his essay on True Virtue that the special illumination gives apprehension only of the same truths that are revealed in the word of God and does not suggest any truths or propositions not contained therein.⁴⁸

Solomon Williams opposed Edwards, arguing that the appreciation of divine excellency, which to Edwards meant salvation, does not come by a sensibly perceived supernatural illumination and that ~~that~~ there is not any spiritual and gracious discovery made to the soul of the infinite beauty and amiableness of God except as he is in Christ. Williams seems to overlook Edwards' definite statement that the illumination includes only those things revealed in Scripture. A modern existentialist would have less difficulty in grasping Edwards' meaning.

In conversion, God imparts a divine and supernatural light to the soul, enabling that soul to see and appreciate the loveliness of Christ. It is a sudden experience:

From what has been said, I would observe that it must needs be that conversion is wrought at once. That knowledge, that reformation and conviction that is preparatory to conversion may be gradual, and the work of grace after conversion may be gradually carried on, yet the work of grace upon the soul whereby a person is brought out of a state of total corruption and depravity into a state of grace, to an interest in Christ, and to be actually a child of God, is in a moment.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 15, 13.

⁴⁹ Edwards, Selections from the Unpublished Writings, ed. Grosart, op. cit., p. 25.

"The mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory."⁵⁰ The effects of conversion are manifold and far-reaching, but there is a moment of passing from death unto life.

Once a person, through the influence of the Spirit, has been enabled to appreciate and love Christ, the rationality of the gospel becomes very plain to him.

When he once comes to see Christ's divine loveliness, he wonders no more that he is thought worthy by God the Father to be accepted for the vilest sinner. Now it is not difficult for him to conceive how the blood of Christ should be esteemed by God so precious as to be worthy to be accepted as a compensation for the greatest sins. The soul now properly sees the preciousness of Christ, and so does properly see and understand the very ground and reason of his acceptableness to God, and the value God sets upon his blood, obedience, and intercession. This satisfies the poor guilty soul, and gives it rest, when the finest and most elaborate discourses about the sufficiency of Christ, and suitability of the way of salvation, would not do it. When a man comes to see the proper foundation of faith and affiance with his own eyes, then he believes savingly.⁵¹

Thus conversion is, in a sense, "believing savingly"; but a person could not possibly believe the gospel in a saving way if he had not first been enabled by the Spirit of God to appreciate the true excellency of Christ.

The kind of love of which Edwards spoke is more than

⁵⁰ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 290.

⁵¹ Edwards, "True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils," Works, op. cit., II, 49.

a sentiment. It is not erros but agape. Benevolence to being in general, or, more pointedly, love to God, implies a benevolent propensity of heart in seeking to promote the happiness of God and also a rejoicing in his happiness. One way to do this is through promoting his glory.⁵²

Although it is not purely emotional, it does involve the emotions.

Although to true religion there must indeed be something else besides affection; yet true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them. . . . As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection. As on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding, as well as an affected fervent heart; or where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heat; so, on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things. If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart. . . . A man's having much affection, does not prove that he has any true religion: but if he has no affection, it proves that he has no true religion. The right way, is not to reject all affections, nor to approve all, but to distinguish between them, approving some and rejecting others; separating the wheat and chaff, the gold and the dross, the precious and the vile.⁵³

The love that a converted person has for God involves both active service and a fervent and understanding heart.

⁵² Edwards, "The Nature of True Virtue," Works, op. cit., I, 125.

⁵³ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 243-4.

The experiencing of that love was to Edwards the key to his own spiritual life. It was the goal of his ministry. No one who was without it was truly converted. It may be considered his very definition of conversion. "The Scriptures represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in love."⁵⁴ Lang, writing more recently, describes conversion as an "unexpected, mysterious and sudden infusion of love-emotion" towards God, and cites the exultant spirit of Huntington after his conversion-crisis as typical of many saints.⁵⁵

Such was the conversion to which Edwards sought to lead his hearers. To be motivated by anything less than a pure love for God was to have no true religion at all.

Inquire, therefore, whether you have ever done anything from a gracious respect to God, or out of love to him? Seeking only your worldly interests, or for you to come to public worship on the sabbath, to pray in your families, and other such things, merely in compliance with the general custom, is not bringing forth fruit to God. How is that for God which is only for the sake of custom, the esteem of men, or merely from the fear of hell? What thanks are due to you for not loving your own misery, and for being willing to take some pains to escape burning in hell to all eternity? There is not a devil in hell, but would do the same: Hos. X.1, 'Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.' . . . There is no fruit brought forth to God, where there is nothing done from love,

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

⁵⁵ Lang, op. cit., p. 190.

or true respect to him.⁵⁶

Luther said that one of the marks of the new life is a self-renouncing service of God and man to which the convert dedicates himself under the inspiration of love.⁵⁷

Edwards held that regeneration consists in the communication of a new spiritual sense or taste; that is, a new heart is given. This is done by the Spirit of God. No one is saved who is not changed in this manner, so as to have a love of God for God's own sake. Christianity is more than escape from hell. If the awakened sinner does not progress beyond his desire to escape punishment to an heart-felt desire to please God, arising from a pure love to God, he is yet unsaved. "No light in the understanding is good, which has no such exercise, and no external fruit is good, which does not proceed from such exercises."⁵⁸

In this emphasis he was true to the reformed tradition as expressed by Calvin in his Institutes:

Christ therefore justifies no one whom he does not also sanctify. For these benefits are perpetually and indissolubly connected, . . . since union with Christ, by which we are justified, contains sanctification as well as righteousness.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Edwards, "The Wicked Useful," Works, op. cit., II, 128.

⁵⁷ Paterson, op. cit., p. 109

⁵⁸ Edwards, "Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 243.

⁵⁹ Calvin, Institutes, op. cit., II, 36.

In thinking of Edwards as an evangelist, therefore, it is important to remember that his objective was no less than this, to convert men to God in such a way that the dominant feature of their lives would be a genuine love to God. To accomplish this, the plow would need to go very deep. The change desired was at the center of the heart.

The Evidences of Conversion

The above definition is confirmed and its implications suggested by the tests to which Edwards put the experiences of converts in order to estimate their validity. In the heat of revival, almost everyone wanted a remarkable experience, and the minister felt himself responsible for guiding them toward real rather than false hopes. He approached this problem scientifically and with remarkable acuteness. Paterson singles out Edwards and Augustine as two theologians who "combined the interests and the capacity of a gifted psychologist with their zeal for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls."⁶⁰ Indeed, it was in this field that Edwards made one of his major contributions to the revival movement, his "Thoughts on the Revival in New England" and "Narrative of Surprising Conversions"

⁶⁰ Paterson, op. cit., p. 154.

obtaining wide circulation. The "Treatise Concerning Religious Affections" was especially penetrating and exhaustive.

In the "Religious Affections," he first listed a number of supposed signs of saving grace upon which people were prone to pin their hopes, and showed how they were no indication whether or not the "affections" were "gracious." Then he proposed a number of things that he did consider good indications.

The following he listed as no certain evidences of conversion: (1) That the affections or emotions are very great; (2) That they have great effects on the body; (3) That they give rise to much religious talk; (4) That they were aroused by texts of Scripture; (5) That there is an appearance of love in them; (6) That comforts and joys seem to follow in a certain order; (7) That they dispose people to be zealous in and give much time to external duties of worship; (8) That they dispose people with their mouths to praise and glorify God; (9) That they make people exceedingly confident; (10) That the recounting of them is very affecting to others.

Over against these, he listed what he considered valid indications of conversion: (1) That the affections, or emotions, arise from influences on the heart which are spiritual, supernatural, and divine; (2) That they are

prompted by the excellence of divine things, as they are in themselves, and not from any self-interest in those things; (3) That they arise from the mind being enlightened rightly and spiritually to apprehend divine things, and that they are accompanied with a conviction of the reality and certainty of those things; (4) That they are attended with evangelical humiliation; (5) That they are attended with a change of nature; That they beget such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness, and mercy, as appeared in Christ; (6) That they are in beautiful proportion; (7) That they produce a hunger and thirst for righteousness, rather than a self-satisfied complacence; (8) That they have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.

A comparison of the two lists serves the dual function of revealing unhealthy tendencies in the revivals and of emphasizing by contrast the ideals held by the evangelist. Those manifestations mentioned first depict a state of affairs in which great excitement was generated, people were caused to faint or to become physically ill by the intensity of their emotional disturbance, much stress was placed upon unusual appropriations of Scripture verses, and people looked within themselves for signs of grace and rejoiced in their experiences. Edwards was psychologist enough to know that, while such emotions could indeed accompany true conversion, they could also be prompted by

the excitement and the emotional strain of the revivals. In other words, they could be "enthusiasm," and not true religion at all.

The characteristics mentioned as desirable are quite different in that they are centered not upon self, but upon God. The emotions were to be stirred by supernatural, spiritual influences, and they were to focus not upon the individual's experience of God, but upon God himself. The attraction was not to be supposed benefits to be received, but the attractiveness and loveliness of Christ himself. Gracious affections were to bring a repudiation of self, by contrast to the "humility" some people have of which they are very proud, and an awakening of a genuine love for Christ, and a manifestation of his characteristics in a changed nature. The final test was to be the Christian life. "Christian practice, or a holy life . . . is the chief of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others, and also to their own consciences."⁶¹

The following are specific examples of the penetrating way in which Edwards analyzed supposed conversions. In speaking of a sense of sin, he said that some people

⁶¹ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 320.

speaking almost lightly of their dreadful, black, loathsome filthiness, when they have no real conviction of sin. "They tell you that their sins are set in order before them, they see them stand encompassing them round, with a frightful appearance; when really they are not affected with the aggravations of any one of their sins."⁶² Another writer tells of a young man who, as an experiment in psychology, walked into the room of a classmate and called him a liar. The accused rolled up his sleeves to fight. The first man said, "You admit that you are a sinner, do you not?" "Yes," was the reply, "but you had better not call me a liar." Sins in general are easy to admit; but it is not so easy to acknowledge a specific one.

In speaking of faith, Edwards said that some people think faith means believing that they are in a good estate. "Hence they count it a dreadful sin for them to doubt of their state, whatever frames they are in, and whatever wicked things they do, because it is the great and heinous sin of unbelief."⁶³ Going on to examine such a supposition, he observed: The Scripture represents faith, as that by which men are brought into a good estate; and therefore it cannot

⁶² Ibid. p. 253.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 259.

be the same thing, as believing that they are already in a good estate." Pressing the point in typical Edwardian fashion, he continued: "To suppose that faith consists in persons' believing that they are in a good estate, is in effect the same thing, as to suppose that faith consists in a person's believing that he has faith, or in believing that he believes!" which, said Edwards, is absurd. Actually, one should not exercise himself in trying to believe that he believes, but should so commit himself to Christ and yield to him that his life will bear abundant evidence that he does indeed believe savingly.

In speaking of persons who breathe a sigh of relief when they believe themselves converted, and immediately relax spiritually to the neglect of their duties and become unconcerned about their conduct because they consider themselves out of danger of hell, Edwards made this accusation:

Such persons as these, instead of embracing Christ as their Saviour from sin, trust in him as the saviour of their sins; instead of flying to him as their refuge from their spiritual enemies, they make use of him as the defence of their spiritual enemies, from God, and to strengthen them against him. They make Christ the minister of sin.⁶⁴

These examples are selected from among many and presented here because they illustrate the flavor and tone

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 307.

of Edwards' probing into the real and the false evidences of conversion.

Another source of light upon Edwards' standard for measuring the evidences of conversion is a manuscript entitled "Directions for Judging of Persons' Experiences" and published by Grosart in the Selections from the Unpublished Writings, already mentioned. Says Grosart, "I have come upon this searching and very precious MS . . . It evidently formed the author's guide in his test-conversations with enquirers during the great Awakenings or Revivals."⁶⁵ The tests, somewhat condensed, appear below:

That the operation be much upon the Will or Heart, not on the Imagination, nor on the speculative understanding or motions of the mind, though they draw great affections after 'em as the consequence.

That the trouble of mind be reasonable, that the mind be troubled about those things that it has reason to be troubled about. . . .

That it be because their state appears terrible on the account of those things, wherein its dreadfulness indeed consists; and that their concern be solid, not operating very much by pangs and sudden passions, freaks and frights, and capriciousness of mind.

That under their seeming convictions it be sin indeed; that they are convinced of their guilt, in offending and affronting so great a God: One that so hates sin, and is so set against it, to punish it, etc.

That they be convinced both of sins of heart and life.

⁶⁵ Edwards, Selections from the Unpublished Writings, ed. Grosart, op. cit., p. 13.

That they don't excuse their slight of Christ, and want of love to Him, because they can't esteem and love Him.

. . . That they don't evidently themselves look on their convictions [as] great, and ben't taken with their own humiliation. . . .

That they have not only pretended convictions of sin; but a proper mourning for sin

That God and divine things are admirable on account of the beauty of their moral perfection. . . .

That there is to be discerned in their sense of the sufficiency of Christ, a sense of that Divine, supreme, and spiritual sufficiency of Christ wherein this sufficiency fundamentally consists. . . .

That their discoveries and illuminations and experiences in general, are not superficial pangs, flashes, imaginations, freaks, but solid, substantial, deep, inwrought into the frame and temper of their minds, and discovered to have respect to practice.

That they long after holiness, and that all their experiences increase their longing. . . .

Whether, when they tell of their experiences, it is not with such an air that you as it were feel that they expect to be admired and applauded. . . .

Enquire whether their joy be truly and properly joy in God and in Christ; joy in divine Good; or whether it ben't wholly joy in themselves, joy in their own excellencies or privileges, in their experiences.⁶⁶

There is ample justification for Miller's reference to the "insecurity" generated by Edwards' preaching, and for Schafer's noting that he wedded the revival to heart worship of God and intense moral earnestness. Such probing as the above into the hearts of any congregation at any

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 183-5.

period of history, if it were done convincingly, could shake the confidence of nominal Christians and lay before them a tremendous challenge. It is no wonder that Miller calls Edwards a peculiar figure among the revivalists, because language such as the above possesses a depth and substance not usually encountered in ordinary revivalists. Indeed, those who know Edwards only by his Enfield sermon would hardly expect such language from him; but there it is.

Edwards expected that real converts should come to a thorough conviction of their guilt and depraved state by nature; that they should feel their total inability in themselves to do anything for their own recovery; that they should discern, at least in part, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the character of the Saviour as he is revealed in Scripture; that they should believe in him for salvation; and that they should determine, through grace, to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart.

While his preaching tended to awaken strong emotions, and made definite and calculated use of fear, he made a distinction between fear and conviction, holding that while conviction often induced fear, fear did not always indicate true conviction. At the beginning of his revival successes he wrote of "surprising conversions," emphasizing the violence of them and their outward manifestations; but

as abuses increased he became more and more wary of recognizing what he came to call "emotions in animal nature" as evidences of a real experience.⁶⁷

In 1747, when he preached at the funeral of David Brainerd, he discounted such emotions and stressed a more intellectual response to the gospel. Brainerd's experience at the time of his conversion, said Edwards, was very agreeable to reason and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the change being very great and remarkable,

without any appearance of strong impressions on the imagination, sudden flights and pangs of the affections, and vehement emotions in animal nature; but attended with proper intellectual views of the supreme glory of the Divine Being, consisting in the infinite dignity and beauty of the perfections of his nature, and of the transcendent excellency of the way of salvation by Christ.⁶⁸

Winslow says that although Edwards was classified among the New Lights,⁶⁹ he "consistently maintained a middle position, viewing with deep concern the increased

⁶⁷ Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God . . .," Works, op. cit., I, 344.

⁶⁸ Edwards, "True Saints, when Absent from the Body, are Present with the Lord," Works, op. cit., II, 32.

⁶⁹ Some of the New Lights were guilty of extremes. Sweet says that Gilbert Tennent's one theme during a three-months preaching tour in New England was "hell-fire and damnation." He also states that John Davenport on one occasion addressed a congregation for nearly twenty-four hours without interruption.

emphasis on bodily manifestations . . . but insisting there might well be a connection between such manifestations and the unusual presence of divine power."⁷⁰

The evidences of a true conversion, Edwards maintained persistently and at length, are not the strong emotions and physical effects that sometimes accompany conversion, but the inward qualities of a changed heart, mind, and will. Conversion "sets the soul at liberty from its bondage to glorify Him."⁷¹ Saving grace may be summarized as love. God puts it into the hearts of converts to have a relish for divine things--to love him. All other graces follow.⁷²

Paterson's conclusion is remarkably similar: "The marks of the new man are that he is knit to God by filial devotion, to his fellow-creatures by brotherly love, and that he accepts for himself the obligation, which is likewise the privilege, of being in the world as the servant of God and man."⁷³ Citron gives a more condensed statement of the same concept: "All marks of the new birth are

⁷⁰ Winslow, op. cit., p. 201.

⁷¹ Edwards, Selections, ed. Grosart, op. cit., p. 27.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 34-38.

⁷³ Paterson, op. cit., p. 40.

manifestations of love."⁷⁴ Or in the words of James Stewart, "Let love get hold of a man, and it can transform him utterly."⁷⁵

The experience of conversion was, of course, that at which Edwards aimed in his evangelistic preaching. An examination of the steps leading to conversion as he presented them, of his idea of the very essence of conversion rooted deep in his own personal experience, and of those signs which he considered valid evidences of true conversion, have led to one conclusion: to be converted is to come to love God. This should be the net result of an acceptance of the way of salvation, which was the subject of the chapter immediately preceding. The next concern will be the technique or method of preaching which Edwards employed in presenting the gospel in order that it might have the desired result.

⁷⁴ Bernhard Citron, New Birth (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 1951), p. 149.

⁷⁵ James S. Stewart, The Gates of New Life (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), p. 178.

CHAPTER VI

THE TECHNIQUE OF EVANGELISM

This chapter deals with the problem of communication--how one may impart to others the experience of conversion. Edwards used certain means, or tools, in his efforts to reach the hearts of his hearers with his message. Strictly speaking, he maintained that saving faith, which he described as a "sense of the heart," is a "divine and supernatural light" and is "immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God."¹ At the same time, God does not work wholly without means, and the proper use of means is a solemn responsibility of the minister and of the person seeking salvation. The thought is, basically, that if a person will prepare himself as thoroughly as is humanly possible, he may then have a strong hope that God will supply the supernatural light. The best technique of evangelism is, therefore, the one which gives the listener the most vivid and convincing impressions of divine truth, thereby preparing him most thoroughly to receive God's gift.

In Edwards' efforts to make the gospel vivid and impressive, the following played important roles: Lockean

¹ Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A. M., ed. Edward Hickman (London: Ball, Arnold & Co., 1840), II, 12.

psychology, Scripture, reason, emotion, and prayer. Their relative importance and their combined effects, as used by Edwards, form the subject matter of the pages that follow.

I. THE USE OF LOCKEAN PSYCHOLOGY

Practically everyone who has written on any phase of Edwards' thought has called attention to the influence of John Locke.

Schafer says that Edwards produced a "remarkable synthesis of Reformed Theology with the Newtonian world-view, Lockean empiricism with Augustinian illuminism, the Christian 'plan of salvation' and concept of history with Platonic idealism and Neoplatonic emanationism."² Christie points out that he "shows his debt to Locke but also a profound originality, logical acumen, and critical discrimination in the use of terms."³ Miller sees Locke's influence and says emphatically: "Though there were other intellectual influences in his life--Calvin, the traditional body of Puritan science, Cudworth, and Hutcheson--yet Locke

² Thomas A. Schafer, "Jonathan Edwards," an article prepared for publication in the next edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica, p. 6 of the manuscript.

³ Francis A. Christie, "Jonathan Edwards," Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson & Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), VI, 36.

and Newton were far and away the dominating sources, and from them he acquired almost all his theoretical starting points."⁴ He names Edwards as the first of American empiricists.

That which Edwards gleaned from Locke was particularly germane to his evangelism. Locke's thesis was that the human mind does not have innate ideas, but is as a sheet of white paper waiting to record impressions received through the senses. He traced the sources of all ideas to what he called sensation and reflection. In other words, all that one can know is that which he gathers from objects of experience. The ideas thus gained from objects of experience are given names. These names become signs of a man's ideas, and are used to communicate the ideas to other people. For the most part, the signs used designate the same conceptions to one person as to another, so that language serves as a means of transmitting ideas. If they did not, there would be no communication, as there is none between peoples who speak entirely different languages.

Words, by constant use, come to stand so definitely for the ideas they represent that the "names heard, almost as readily excite certain ideas, as if the objects themselves,

⁴ Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," Harvard Theological Review, XLI (1948), 124.

which are apt to produce them, did actually affect the senses."⁵ Although such is the power of words, there are certain limitations and dangers. First, a given word may stand for one idea to one person, and for a slightly different or even quite different idea to another person. Secondly, it is possible for words to be heard so often that they become familiar and much used, while the real significance of them is not understood, so that men sometimes find themselves thinking and speaking not of things but merely of words. "Because words are many of them learned before the ideas are known for which they stand; therefore some, not only children, but men, speak several words no otherwise than parrots do, only because they have learned them, and have been accustomed to those sounds . . . they are nothing but so much insignificant noise."⁶

Edwards did not admit all of the implications that have been drawn from Locke, nor did he limit himself to Locke's conceptions. The utilitarian school of philosophy claims Locke as its father, and subjectivists lean heavily upon him; but the fact that Edwards was influenced by Locke does not mean that he belonged to either of these schools of

⁵ John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Edinburgh: Printed for Doig & Stirling, 1815), II, 74.

⁶ Ibid.

thought. He was not bound by Locke's ideas, but stimulated by them. That we can know only what we sensibly perceive did not mean to Edwards that we are shut up within the five senses, but rather that the only way really to know is to perceive, or to "sense."⁷ Hence there is throughout his writings a continual use of the idea that men must be "made sensible" to the truths of the gospel. He did not believe that ideas are merely copies of original impressions, nor that persons are passive clay to be molded by their experiences without their own activity. Instead, he saw in the sensational psychology a way to make eternal truth a living thing in human experience.

He studied Locke, not the systems that have been built upon Locke. He was a Puritan before he was a Lockean, and did not sacrifice the first for the latter. Moreover, as Winslow says, he was first of all a man of faith, and secondarily a philosopher. Actually, he brought psychology to the service of religion.

Edwards could transform Locke's sensationalism, even while remaining a faithful adherent, because he could make the leap which was too strenuous for Locke: if facts do not speak to the passive intelligence merely as what the human mind, in its finitude and its pride, would be pleased to make out of them, then they must come already charged with meaning by an intelligence

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, Images or Shadows of Divine Things, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 19.

behind them. Otherwise life would indeed be a play of fancy. . . .

The absolute significance, variously "shadowed," is rightly caught by the alert, the disciplined, the humble--that is to say, the regenerate--perception.⁸

The insight which Edwards gained from Locke was that a word might become detached from the sensation for which it stands. "A great part of our thoughts and the discourse of our minds concerning things," wrote Edwards, "is without the actual ideas of those things of which we discourse and reason; but the mind makes use of signs instead of the ideas themselves."⁹ This thought he elaborated upon in his *Notes on the Sense of the Heart*. A man might feel that he has in a minute read with understanding a page in a book, although that page may contain such words as God, man, angel, people, misery, happiness, salvation, destruction, and many others. Can he honestly say that he has in that minute of time had any actual idea of God? That is, did his reading convey to him a real idea of the supremacy, knowledge, will, etc., which are essential qualities of God, or did he in his reading simply make use of the word "God" as a sign rather than as an actual idea? Did he have

⁸ Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," Harvard Theological Review, XLI, (1948), 124.

⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

any real perception of the meanings of the other important words?

There is a practical use for this type of communication, for if one stopped to reflect and attempt to comprehend the full significance of every word he reads or hears, the process would be intolerably slow; yet such rapid perusal of any thing is a mere handling of signs, and no real apprehension of the subjects.

Beyond such mere cogitation, there is the possibility of what Edwards called a "direct ideal view," or contemplation of the actual thing about which one is thinking. This may be of two kinds, depending upon whether it is mere speculation, affecting only the head, or whether it affects the will or the heart. Will and heart are used interchangeably in this case by Edwards, and by a sense of the heart he means an apprehension of the good or evil which the thing contemplated portends, and of the qualities which make it either good or evil.

People are capable of some sensible knowledge of the good or evil that attends the things of religion insofar as it affects and is understood by human nature; yet any strong sense of them is usually due to the influence of the Spirit of God assisting the faculties of human nature.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

People are capable of being encouraged and comforted, or disquieted and frightened, by an apprehension of the good or evil that the Gospel holds for those who accept or reject it; but it must be remembered that, to Edwards, genuine conversion meant more than a seeking prompted by self-interest. He consistently insisted upon a due appreciation of the excellencies of God for his own sake. This sense of the heart concerning the excellency of God is not grasped by human nature and "must be wholly and entirely a work of the Spirit of God, not merely as assisting and coworking with natural principles, but as infusing something above nature."¹¹ The sermon on "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God," advances precisely this line of thought.

The common work of the Spirit of God leads men to conviction by "assisting natural principles without infusing anything supernatural."¹² The Spirit in his common work helps them attain an "ideal view" of God's natural perfections, which sharpens their sense of the awfulness of sin and of the guilt and punishment which attend it and makes them appreciate the glory of heaven and the importance of the truths of the gospel. The special work of the Spirit

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 142.

gives them a sense of the "spiritual excellency, beauty, or sweetness of divine things"; and this work of the Spirit is supernatural. Regeneration, real conversion, comes about only by the Spirit of God infusing a supernatural light into the soul.

The important thing to realize is that, in Edwards' view, the latter is built upon the former. The special work of the Spirit in regeneration is built upon the common work of conviction. The following excerpt gives Edwards' expression of this concept:

All saving conviction of divine truth does most essentially arise from the spiritual sense of the excellency of divine things; yet this sense of spiritual excellency is not the only kind of ideal apprehension or sense of divine things that is concerned in such a conviction, but it also partly depends on a sensible knowledge of what is natural in religion; as this may be needful to prepare the mind for a sense of its spiritual excellency; and as such a sense of its spiritual excellency may depend upon it. For as the spiritual excellency of the things of religion itself does depend on and presuppose those things that are natural in religion, they being as it were the substratum of this spiritual excellency; so a sense, or ideal apprehension, of the one depends in some measure on the ideal apprehension of the other.¹³

For example, a due appreciation of God's excellency in forgiving sin (which is a part of special, saving grace) depends on a conviction of the great guilt of sin and the punishment which it deserves (which is a common work of

¹³ Ibid., p. 143.

the Spirit, assisting natural powers). A sense of the glory and holiness of God and of the excellency of Christ's salvation depends upon a consciousness of the misery and guilt of those who are the subjects of salvation. "Though a saving conviction of the truth of the things of religion does most directly and immediately depend on a sense of their spiritual excellency, yet it also in some measure and more indirectly and remotely depends on an ideal apprehension of what is natural in religion and in a common conviction."¹⁴

Perry Miller sees this as "the originality of Edwards' argument--the fundamental insight around which his projected system would have swung" and describes it as a "realization that the second stage depends upon and presumes the first, that 'saving conviction' presupposes an 'ideal apprehension' garnered from sense experience. . . . Out of the mechanism of sensation arises the sense of the heart, and eternal salvation becomes possible in the midst of time."¹⁵

The influence of Lockean empiricism upon Edwards' evangelism is immediately obvious. His goal was an Augustinian illuminism, but his method of approaching that goal was the sensational psychology. He would exclaim with

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 127-8.

Augustine, "How shall we obtain salvation, but from Thy hand, remaking what it made?";¹⁶ but he laid the groundwork for the supernatural experience by appealing to the natural senses. If words are merely signs for ideas, and if the words may lose their power to stimulate a real sense of the idea itself, then preaching may lose its power. The words themselves may become the objects suggested to the mind, rather than the realities which the words were originally intended to represent. Even under orthodox, Calvinistic, Puritan preaching, congregations may become utterly lost among signs, words which have lost their ability to stimulate a vital consciousness of reality.

This Edwards saw happening in New England. There were risings of Arminian doctrine in the Congregational Churches, and a great deal of it in the Church of England, and some outstanding American religious leaders felt its appeal and defected to the Episcopal Church;¹⁷ but preaching in New England pulpits was, for the most part, the traditional Calvinism. The difficulty was that it had lost its power to interest and hold its congregations; and this, Edwards believed, was because the words used had become

¹⁶ St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. E. B. Pusey, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1950), p. 89.

¹⁷ Christie, op. cit., p. 31.

commonplace and did not awaken the senses of the hearers. If people were to be prepared for the "supernatural light," they would first have to be awakened thoroughly to the realities which their own human nature, assisted by the common work of the Holy Spirit, could grasp. To this end he formulated his "sensational" preaching.

The word "sensational," as applied to religion and especially to evangelism, has come into disrepute, suggesting as it does dramatic and sometimes superficial and artificial attempts to draw popular attention to religious services. "Sensationalism," as a technical term, has a more definite and respectable meaning. It is simply the theory that all knowledge originates in sensation, and that all consciousness is modified sensation. In this technical sense, Edwards was purposely sensational in his evangelistic efforts. He endeavored to make the situation so real, so immediate, that his hearers could gain a "sensible" impression--indeed, if the word may be used without evil connotations, a "sensuous" apprehension.

It is worthy of note that a writer of more recent date reflects the same appreciation of the senses that was advanced by Locke and used by Edwards:

The senses are the gateways of our awareness. They are the avenues along which we move into contact with the world around us. Without this sensuous awareness of the world, no consciousness and no knowledge of any kind is possible, for human beings at least. Even our

knowledge of God is only possible through the awareness of the world which our senses provide.¹⁸

Macmurray continues: "The education of our emotional life is primarily an education of our sensibility. It is the training of our sensuality. . . . Sensuality means properly the capacity to enjoy organic experience, to enjoy the satisfaction of the senses."¹⁹ Macmurray and Edwards made radically different uses of the insight, but the basic concept is the same.

It is, therefore, no accident, nor the yielding to a whim, nor the desire to be spectacular, that led Edwards to a manner of preaching which held an idea mercilessly before his listeners until they not only understood, but felt, its meaning. If Locke was right, and Edwards was convinced that he was, then the mere formulation of a concept into words was not enough. It was the duty of the preacher to give his listeners a "lively sense" of the truths of the gospel, and to make them feel personally involved. "When a man is threatened, when his life is endangered, the whole man is alerted; the word then becomes one with the thing, becomes in that crisis a signal for

¹⁸ John Macmurray, Reason and Emotion (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1935), p. 39.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

positive action . . . so the Spirit of God works through the mechanism of the sense impression."²⁰

The same thing is true when the idea presented is grasped by the listener as having something good for him. He responds not only with the intellect but with the will. If the person responds as best he can to the idea, if he strives to keep it from flickering, then the Holy Spirit moves in "miraculously and yet logically" to give conviction through his common work and saving faith through his special work. Thus Edwards put directly to work in the service of evangelism the empirical, sensational psychology which he received from Locke.

In this appears one of the distinguishing characteristics of Edwards' evangelism, and perhaps the most important difference between him and the usual Puritan preacher of his day. In the schools and in the pulpits of that day the supposition (drawn from Augustine) was that ideas of truth were innate in the human mind and needed only to be suggested by words in order to be brought to immediate conscious reality. Edwards accepted from Locke the proposition that ideas were not innate, and needed not only to be suggested, but forcibly impressed upon the mind and heart. If he had merely stated his doctrines, he would have been

²⁰ Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," op. cit., p. 127.

one among a multitude; but the new psychology constrained him to make sure that his doctrines became living realities to his hearers.

In his lectures at New College, Professor James S. Stewart challenges young ministers to preach, not to gain the approval of their congregations, nor to cause people to think highly of the sermon or of the preacher, but to bring each listener personally into the situation. A sermon about the thief on the cross, for example, should use the Scriptural story and fill in from imagination the probable background of the thief and should have the effect of putting the listener into the place of the thief, so that he might sense the awfulness of punishment, feel the pangs of remorse, and hear the pardoning words of Christ as addressed to him, personally.

Karl Barth's theology is "a warning cry, with much of the element of ejaculation; and those who have to warn their neighbours use great plainness of speech."²¹ His great thrust is to break up complacency and penetrate to the heart with the mighty Word of God.

Edwards' evangelism was, in its way, a "theology of crisis," a confrontation with the Word of God calculated to

²¹ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, Schleiermacher to Barth (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1949), p. 314.

be very difficult to dodge, deflect, or ignore.

II. . THE USE OF SCRIPTURE

In line with his theory that truth must not only be presented to his congregation but impressed upon their minds and hearts, Edwards sought to make his proclamations of the gospel not only probably true but compellingly authoritative. Most of his sermons present, right after the introduction, a "doctrine" or "proposition" which he intends to prove. The doctrine is propounded, and then buttressed, almost always with a combined appeal to the authority of Scripture and to reason. His address on "A Divine and Supernatural Light" is a typical example. The third division of the sermon is to "Show the truth of the doctrine." Its sub-headings are, "First, It is scriptural"; "Secondly, This doctrine is rational."²²

This section presents the susceptibility of the contemporary atmosphere to biblical preaching, then Edwards' personal convictions about the Bible, and finally his manner of using the Scriptures in preaching.

To understand the force of his arguments from Scripture, it is necessary to bear in mind the attitude that early New

²² Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," Works, op. cit., II, 15-16.

Englishmen maintained toward the Bible. Reared in the Puritan tradition, most of them gave lip service to it even though their increased material wealth and growing interest in temporal things had softened their spiritual muscles until, generally, they were no longer making any serious effort to live up to its standards. They were "believing" Puritans, although not "practicing." They stood in the Protestant tradition of re-emphasis upon the Bible, and their thoughts did not so much refute as ignore the Scriptures. Edwards' insistent appeals to scriptural proofs for his doctrines meshed with presuppositions already in the minds of his congregation, a fact which gave them tremendous force.

As Miller and Johnson report, "The Puritan thought the Bible, the revealed word of God, was the word of God from one end to the other, a complete body of laws, an absolute code in everything it touched upon."²³ Winslow attributes the "particular strength" of Edwards' sermons to the "current respect paid to the authority of Scripture." "At every point he buttressed his own thought with such weight of proof as seemed incontrovertible to those trained

²³ Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans (New York: American Book Co., 1938), p. 43.

to accept line and verse as authoritative and final."²⁴

"His figures of speech were almost strictly scriptural."²⁵

Edwards himself felt that he was addressing an audience that would accept the Scripture as authoritative. For example, in his treatise on "qualifications for communion," he wrote: "None will suppose, that he has good and proper ground for such a conduct [that of applying for admission to the Lord's Supper] who does not believe another world, nor believe the Bible to be the word of God."²⁶ In the large work on the "Freedom of the Will" he declared what he intended to prove, and inserted this telling phrase about his and his readers' view of Scripture: ". . . supposing myself herein to have to do with such as own the truth of the Bible."²⁷

Concerning Edwards' personal beliefs about the Scriptures, Winslow observes: "Years of young zeal in the study of the Bible lay back of the preacher's earnest conviction that the old doctrine was also the right doctrine."²⁸

²⁴ Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 161.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

²⁶ Edwards, "Qualifications for Communion," Works, op. cit., II, 435.

²⁷ Edwards, Works, ed. Dwight, op. cit., II, 98.

²⁸ Winslow, op. cit., p. 161.

"Habitually, he gave large place to the exposition of the Scripture text, repeating the familiar story as though it were being told for the first time. He had skill in narrative, and his simple handling of the biblical events is often, as a piece of writing, the best part of his sermon."²⁹

From his own writings, the following quotations are expressive of his personal convictions. The first is from the selections from unpublished manuscripts prepared for private distribution by Grosart: "There must be some word of God. . . . But where is any Word of God if it ben't [be not] in the Bible? . . . The Bible therefore is the Word of God, must be. . . . Should hear the Word: come to meeting. 'Tis the way to have God's mercy, to seek God in His Word."³⁰

From his essay on Christian Knowledge:

Divinity is not learned, as other sciences, merely by improvement of man's natural reason, but is taught by God himself in a book full of instruction, which he hath given us for that end. This is the rule which God hath given to the world to be their guide in searching after this kind of knowledge, and is a summary of all things of this nature needful for us to know. Upon this account divinity is rather called a doctrine, than an art or science.

Indeed there is what is called natural religion.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 140.

³⁰ Jonathan Edwards, Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards, of America, ed. Alexander B. Grosart from orig. MSS (Edinburgh: Ballantyne & Co., 1965), pp. 191-219.

There are many truths concerning God and our duty to him, which are evident by the light of nature. But Christian divinity, properly so called, is not evident by the light of nature; it depends upon revelation. Such are our circumstances now in our fallen state, that nothing which it is needful for us to know concerning God is manifest by the light of nature, in the manner in which it is necessary for us to know it. For the knowledge of no truth in divinity is of significance to us, any otherwise than as it some way or other belongs to the gospel scheme, or as it relates to a Mediator. But the light of nature teaches us no truth in this matter. Therefore it cannot be said that we come to the knowledge of any part of Christian truth by the light of nature. It is only the word of God, contained in the Old and New Testament, which teaches us Christian divinity.³¹

Further mention will be made in a subsequent section of the relationship between revelation and reason, and parts of this statement will be cited again; but it is presented here as a considered definition of Edwards' attitude toward Scripture, being part of a formal thesis.

As to the supernatural nature of Scripture, he wrote, in another formal work:

There is no restraint to be laid upon the Spirit of God, as to what he shall reveal to a prophet, for the benefit of his church, who is speaking or writing under immediate inspiration. The Spirit of God may reveal to such an one, and dictate to him to declare to others, secret things, that otherwise would be hard, yea impossible for him to find out. As he may reveal to him mysteries, which otherwise would be above his reason; or things in a distant place, that he cannot see; or future events, which it would be impossible for him to know and declare, if they were not extraordinarily revealed

³¹ Edwards, "Christian Knowledge," Works, op. cit., II, 158.

to him.³²

In his revival sermons on Justification by Faith, Edwards referred to the Holy Scriptures as "the revelation that God has given us of his mind and will--by which alone we can never [the context shows clearly that he means ever] come to know how those who have offended God can come to be accepted of him, and justified in his sight."³³ The fulfilment of Scripture prophecy strengthened his conviction that that which remains will be fulfilled as predicted.³⁴ The remarkable preservation of the Bible through the ages argued to him that it must be the true Gospel, because "surely God does not use his almighty power to promote a mere imposture and delusion."³⁵

"Now," he concluded, "the canon of Scripture, that great standing written rule, which was begun about Moses's time, is completed and settled, and a curse denounced against him that adds anything to it, or diminishes any thing from it."³⁶

³² Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, 299.

³³ Ibid., I, 630.

³⁴ Ibid., I, 603-4.

³⁵ Ibid., I, 594.

³⁶ Ibid., I, 588.

Turning from statements bearing directly upon Edwards' personal convictions about the Bible, one finds revealing light in his remarks concerning those who held it in less regard:

And doubtless those who despise the Scriptures, and boast of the strength of their own reason, as being sufficient to lead into the knowledge of the one true God, if the Gospel had never come abroad in the world to enlighten their forefathers, would have been as sottish and brutish idolaters as the world in general was before the gospel came abroad.³⁷

The notion that was one of the blights upon the revival movement, that a person who is fluent and fervent is therefore a true Christian, Edwards denounced as "a mistake into which persons often run, through their trusting their own wisdom, and making their own notions their rule, instead of the Holy Scripture."³⁸ Correcting another error, that a set order of experiences was necessary to salvation, he insisted that the effects and not the steps toward it are magnified in Scripture, and again added an observation indicative of his regard for the Bible: "Which should be enough with Christians, who are willing to have the word of God, rather than their own philosophy, and experiences, and conjectures as their sufficient and sure guide in things

³⁷ Edwards, "A History of the Work of Redemption," Works, op. cit., I, 593.

³⁸ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 247.

of this nature."³⁹

A sentence tacked onto the same argument is in the same vein: "Thus I have endeavored to describe the heart and behavior of one who is governed by a truly gracious humility as exactly agreeable to the Scriptures as I am able."⁴⁰

In his vigorous opposition to Arminian questioning of the doctrine of God's sovereign grace, he again revealed his dependence upon Scriptural argument, and accused his opponents of misusing and misinterpreting the Bible: "The vast pretences of these Arminians to an accurate and clear view of the scope and design of the sacred penmen, and a critical knowledge of the original, will prove for ever vain and insufficient to help them against such clear evidence as the Scripture exhibits concerning efficacious grace."⁴¹

On the other hand, he attributed a high view of the authority of the Bible to the influence of the Holy Spirit. "The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God." This is his deduction from I John 4:6.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 254.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 302.

⁴¹ Edwards, "Efficacious Grace," Works, op. cit., II, 549.

Winslow says of his preaching, "He had to an unusual degree the faculty of objectifying his concepts, but his imagination needed something tangible with which to start. This the biblical poet had already supplied."⁴² This was as true of his thinking as of his preaching. He needed the Bible with which to begin. He entered into his studies of the Scriptures early, in the Puritan home of his minister father, and pursued them with more and more inquisitiveness. Looking upon the Old Testament as introductory and explanatory of the New, and the New Testament as unfolding the real drift and bearing of every part of the Old, he seems to have resolved to make every effort to understand in every part that he read the true meaning of its Author.⁴³

The Scriptures were, in his estimation, "the word of God,"⁴⁴ and were "designated of God to be the proper means to bring the world to the knowledge of himself."⁴⁵ The truths of religion were to be ascertained, not through human reasoning, but from revelation (although reason should be brought to bear upon truths revealed). It would have been impossible for men, even under the best conditions, to have

⁴² Winslow, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴³ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lxi.

⁴⁴ Edwards, "History of Redemption," Works, op. cit., I, 602.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 593.

learned the truth concerning God and their relationship to him had he not revealed it to them.

Till the gospel and the Holy Scriptures came abroad, all the world lay in ignorance of the true God, and in the greatest darkness with respect to religion, embracing the absurdest opinions and practices, which all civilized nations now acknowledge to be childish fooleries. The light of nature, their own reason, and all the wisdom of learned men, signified nothing till the Scriptures came. If the Scriptures be not the word of God, then they are nothing but darkness and delusion, yea, the greatest delusion that ever was.⁴⁶

Edwards studied the Bible to receive implicitly what it teaches, but he read other books to examine their soundness and to employ them as helps in the investigation of principles and the discovery of truth.⁴⁷

The appeal of the Scriptures to Edwards' mind is illustrated by an early notation:

I had then, and at other times, the greatest delight in the Holy Scriptures of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes in reading it every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart, and those sweet and powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading; often dwelling long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it; and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders.⁴⁸

These "wonders" were not the special revelations sometimes claimed by mystics, as though new truth were

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 593.

⁴⁷ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lvi.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

revealed to them in a subjective way. Edwards vigorously combatted the idea, which was one of the disfiguring marks that enthusiasm made upon the Awakening, that God puts new meanings into the Scripture as it is brought to the mind: e.g., a person taking "Fear not to go down into Egypt" to mean that God encourages him to go to a particular land. He maintained, rather, that a true understanding of the Bible is a matter of grasping the truths that it originally intended to reveal, and that have always been contained therein.

Spiritually to understand the Scripture, is to have the eyes of the mind opened to behold the wonderful, spiritual excellency of the glorious things contained in the true meaning of it, and that always were contained in it, ever since it was written; to behold the amiable and bright manifestations of the divine perfections, the excellency and sufficiency of Christ, the suitability of the way of salvation by him, and spiritual glory of the precepts and promises of Scripture, etc. These things are, and always were in the Bible, and would have been seen before, if it had not been for blindness, without having any new sense added.⁴⁹

The view of Scripture expressed by Edwards in the above quotations is not peculiar to him. It is the doctrine of the Reformation. Unless labeled, the following words of Calvin might easily be mistaken for another excerpt from Edwards:

But observe, that men then revolted from God, when, having forsaken his word, they lent their ears to the falsehoods of Satan. Hence we infer, that God will be

⁴⁹ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., p. 285.

seen and adored in his word; and, therefore, that all reverence for him is shaken off when his word is despised. . . . For never would they have dared to resist God, unless they had first been incredulous of his word.⁵⁰

Without pursuing the inquiry into intricate matters of various "theories of inspiration," suffice it to say that Edwards accepted the Bible as true, and used its words with telling effect upon a generation which also tacitly acknowledged its veracity.

Emphasis upon the fact that the Scriptures were available as a powerful tool in Edwards' day is not intended to suggest that they are weaker today. Karl Barth, in the present generation, has written voluminously upon the Word of God; and while his concepts differ considerably and his terminologies differ radically from those voiced by the Puritans, he insists upon the centrality of the Word.⁵¹ Stewart pleads for "unremitting Bible study": "I have already urged upon you," he says, "the vital importance of expository preaching. Here let me add that it is only as we live in the Bible--devotionally, and as students of the

⁵⁰ John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis, trans. John King (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), I, 153-4.

⁵¹ Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1949), p. 114.

sacred word--that we can hope to find the manna falling regularly for our people's need."⁵²

There is one important distinction that must be kept in view as one contemplates Edwards in his role as a biblical preacher. He did not consider himself limited in his teaching to those things which are expressly stated, in so many words, in the Scriptures, but felt himself at liberty to draw inferences from the statements and reach such conclusions from them that seemed reasonable and to preach such conclusions as scriptural doctrines. This appears from his own statement of his belief:

When we inquire, whether or no we have scripture grounds for any doctrine, the question is, Whether or no the Scripture exhibits it any way to the eye of the mind, or to the eye of reason? We have no grounds to assert, that it was God's intent, by the Scripture, in so many terms, to declare every doctrine that he would have us believe.⁵³

He goes on to say, "There are many things the Scripture may suppose that we know already. And if what the Scripture says, together with what is plain to reason, leads to believe any doctrine, we are to look upon ourselves as taught that doctrine by the Scripture."

⁵² James S. Stewart, Heralds of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 154.

⁵³ Edwards, "Miscellaneous Observations," Works, op. cit., II, 474-5.

To a certain extent, such a use of Scripture is justifiable, and indeed unavoidable. The Westminster Confession of Faith with revised proof texts as adopted by the 1910 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, introduces its proof texts with this general note:

At several points the Confession of Faith is more specific in its statements than the Scriptures. These statements are inferences drawn from the Scriptures or from statements based on the Scriptures, or from the experience and observation of the Church. In such cases no texts are cited, but reference is made to this General Note.⁵⁴

Edwards' statement quoted above becomes significant, however, when one places beside it his sermons as preached and notes how far he carried some of the lines of thought that he inferred from Scripture. For instance, Rev. 18:20, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her," meant to him that the saints in heaven will see the torments of the wicked in hell, and will rejoice over them. His sermon on that text is entitled, "The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous," and he developed it thus: The text has to do partly with the overthrow of the antichristian church in this world, and partly with the vengeance of God upon her

⁵⁴ The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (revised edition; Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1956), p. 9.

in the world to come. It is not to be supposed that the full vengeance of God will be exerted upon her in this present world, or that such is the full meaning of the text; because verse 3 of the next chapter says, "Her smoke rose up for ever and ever."

And if we understand the text to have respect only to a temporal execution of God's wrath on his enemies; that will not alter the case. The thing they are called upon to rejoice at, is the execution of God's wrath upon his and their enemies. And if it be matter of rejoicing to them to see justice executed in part upon them, or to see the beginning of the execution of it in this world; for the same reason will they rejoice with greater joy, in beholding it fully executed. For the thing here mentioned as the foundation of their joy, is the execution of just vengeance.⁵⁵

He cautioned that it is not to be understood that they are to rejoice in having their revenge "glutted," but rather in seeing the justice of God executed.

The propositions of this sermon are that the glorified saints will see the wrath of God executed upon ungodly men and that it will be no occasion of grief to them, but rather of rejoicing.

The reasoning by which Edwards supported these propositions is interesting.

The sufferings of the damned will be no occasion of grief to the heavenly inhabitants, as they will have no love nor pity to the damned as such. It will be no

⁵⁵ Edwards, "The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous," Works, op. cit., II, 208.

argument of want of a spirit of love in them, that they do not love the damned; for the heavenly inhabitants will know that it is not fit that they should love them, because they will know then, that God has no love to them, nor pity for them; but that they are the objects of God's eternal hatred. [Subsequently he said that God never loved them] . . . And they [the heavenly inhabitants] will then be perfectly conformed to God in their wills and affections. They will love what God loves, and that only. However the saints in heaven may have loved the damned while here, especially those of them who were near and dear to them in this world, they will have no love to them hereafter. It will be an occasion of their rejoicing, as the glory of God will appear in it.⁵⁶

However interesting such reasoning may be, it is also questionable. The preacher began with a Scriptural injunction, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her," and ended with a graphic description of the ungodly at the coming of Christ, looking hopefully to their godly friends and finding them "unconcerned," but with joyful countenances ascending to meet the Lord, and later shouting the praises of God as sentence is pronounced upon the ungodly. When one hears such a conclusion issuing from such a text, he is bound to question the reasoning processes by which the conclusion was reached.

In the first place, not every interpreter would insist that the destruction of Babylon means the punishment of the wicked in hell. The International Critical Commentary

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

considers the prophecy as referring to the destruction of Rome and the Parthian kings and the larger context as including all the kings of the earth who shared in the abominations of Rome.⁵⁷ The rejoicing of the inhabitants of heaven is over the destruction of Rome. However justifiable it may be to see in this and succeeding chapters of the Revelation a wider judgment upon all the wicked, few commentators would justify a specific and graphic application of Rev. 18:20, phrase by phrase, to a rejoicing of Christians in heaven over the lost in hell. Edwards, however, based one inference upon another inference, copiously buttressed them by scripture quotations that to him implied the correctness of his propositions, and drew the finished picture with great vividness as the positive teaching of Scripture. Such was the outworking of his supposition, already quoted, that a truth does not need to be stated in so many words in Scripture in order to be taught as a Scriptural doctrine. By contrast, most ministers who consider themselves biblical preachers endeavor in fairness to their listeners to place more weight upon the definite statements of Scripture than upon inferences that the preacher draws therefrom.

In the second place, sermons contained in the Bible

⁵⁷ R. H. Charles, The International Critical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1920), pp. 430-4.

itself do not build inference upon inference in the manner employed by Edwards. Stern and solemn warnings to the wicked abound, and their end is clearly stated; but Christ and the apostles, once they have declared the end of the wicked and sounded the warning, do not dwell upon it, nor enlarge greatly upon it, nor endeavor to give all of the details. The nearest parallel to Edwards' sermons on the plight of the lost that we find in the Bible itself is in Mark 9:42, where Jesus say, "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," and, continuing, speaks of the foot, then of the eye, always followed by the refrain, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." This is indeed a use of detail and a pressing of picture upon picture; but it is short and constitutes a statement of fact and a warning, rather than the relentless reasoning that is characteristic of Edwards. The Old Testament prophets issued long and detailed warnings, but did not go nearly so far as Christ in detailing the future estate of the wicked.

Stewart points out that the preaching of the early church was "declaration, not debate." "It was the announcement of certain concrete facts of history. . . . It was

proclamation of the mighty acts of God."⁵⁸

This distinction between Edwards and the usual biblical preacher provides an insight both into the power of his evangelistic sermons and into a basic defect in them.

Winslow correctly observes that "his peculiar power as a preacher lay in his ability to paint pictures. . . .

Jonathan Edwards took the biblical figure and pursued it relentlessly, until heaven, hell, God's wrath, eternal glory, as he preached them, lost their vague outlines and became visible, imminent realities."⁵⁹ At the same time, there is hardly a modern reader who does not draw back in horror at the details he supplied of the plight of the lost and their sufferings in hell, and at the thought of the righteous rejoicing in their destruction. The same characteristic that made his sermons vivid and powerful led him into statements that most readers of his sermons today are unable to accept.

The subject of his use of Scripture has been pursued at considerable length because it played an important part in his evangelistic preaching. Moreover, a sample of his use of it in an "awakening" sermon was selected because it illustrates a key to the power of his preaching in the con-

⁵⁸ Stewart, Heralds of God, op. cit., p. 63.

⁵⁹ Winslow, op. cit., p. 143.

text of his day and at the same time provides an explanation of why many modern readers react violently against that preaching.

In the above paragraphs a transition was begun from a consideration of the use of Scripture in Edwards' technique of evangelism to that which will receive primary attention in the next few pages; that is, his particular employment of reason.

III. THE USE OF REASON

As was intimated at the beginning of this chapter, Edwards felt very strongly that preaching must produce a "sensual apprehension" of the intended idea in order to be effective. Scripture was shown to be one of his tools for producing that apprehension. Another tool was that indicated in the words already quoted: "Secondly, This doctrine is rational."

The extensive use that Edwards made of reason has been widely recognized, although variously interpreted. The significance of his rationalism has been described thus by Harriet Beecher Stowe:

The ministers of the early colonial days of New England . . . took their confession of faith just as the great body of Protestant Reformers left it, and acted upon it as a practical foundation, without much further discussion, until the time of President Edwards. He was the first man who began the disintegrating process of applying rationalistic methods to the accepted doctrines

of religion, and he rationalized far more boldly and widely than any publishers of his biography ever dared to let the world know. He sawed the great dam and let out the whole waters of discussion over all New England, and that free discussion led to all the shades of opinion of our modern days. Little as he thought it, yet Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker were the last results of the current set in motion by Jonathan Edwards.⁶⁰

Perry Miller, in his discussion of Edwards' manuscript on "Images or Shadows of Divine Things," expresses a similar judgment:

After studying his manuscript, the reader may indeed wonder whether Edwards recognized that in reverting to typology he was actually furthering the revolution (that the human reason had wrought within Christendom by the end of the Seventeenth Century), that while professing to be a Calvinist he was reaching out for a method of interpreting both revelation and providence in which the governing principle would be not the will of God but the insight of Jonathan Edwards. Possibly had he seen such implications in this undertaking, he would have suppressed it.⁶¹

This extension of typology . . . was the starting point for a restatement of theology. It was an innovation in New England Puritanism, in Protestantism, because he proposed to mold the mind into the closest possible relation with natural objects, as a glove upon a hand. But in that very proposal was implied a still more radical break with the past: an exaltation of nature to a level of authority coequal with revelation . . . for him, as for all men after him, nature had become as compelling a way of God's speaking, if God speaks at all, as Scripture.⁶²

⁶⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, Old Town Folks (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1897), p. 229.

⁶¹ Jonathan Edwards, Images or Shadows of Divine Things, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 40.

⁶² Ibid., p. 28.

"Edwards was dramatically shifting the traditional emphasis: he was quoting Scripture to confirm the meaning of natural phenomena, not adducing natural images to confirm the meaning of Scripture."⁶³

The long excerpts above, from the writings of careful students of Edwards, are included to punctuate the exceedingly prominent place that reason held in his writings and in his preaching.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to defend or combat the proposition that unbelieving rationalism traces its ancestry back to Jonathan Edwards, because our main concern is with his preaching and its practical evangelistic effects rather than with the implications of his thought processes.

It must be observed, however, that Harriet Beecher Stowe disclaimed for Edwards any notion that he was paving the way for a Waldo Emerson or a Theodore Parker, and that Miller said Edwards would have suppressed any implication, had he seen it, that would have placed reason above revelation: "He would indignantly have denied that he was setting nature above revelation, and most of his life's work was expended in proving the folly of those who did."⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Is the man who first harnessed the natural force of expanding gas and made it serve his purpose of mounting into the sky responsible for the fate of all since that time who have let the forces get out of control and have plunged to destruction? Edwards, except for his "inferences" already discussed, kept his reasonings well under the control of the Bible, which he accepted as true and authoritative, as citations in the section of this chapter dealing with his use of Scripture demonstrate.

Illustrations of Edwards' use of reason may be found in any of his writings, whether they be sermons or formal essays. To cite examples would be superfluous, because all bear that stamp and passages already quoted for their subject matter are sufficient also as demonstrations of style. It has already been noted that Christie attributes to him a "pitiless logical consistency." James Wynne reflects the impression that any reader of his works will receive:

In the development of any subject under his investigation, he was in the habit of assuming a few propositions, which were simple and readily admitted. From these propositions he proceeded to develop their connections with such consummate skill and logical precision, that the conclusions were inevitable.⁶⁵

As a matter of fact, both his premises and his conclusions

⁶⁵ James Wynne, Lives of Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of America (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1850), p. 146.

have often been questioned or rejected, else people everywhere would believe as Edwards did; yet the power of his logic has been generally acknowledged.

His use of logic had a philosophical basis: "Our submission is to be such as becomes rational creatures," he wrote. "God doth not require us to submit contrary to reason, but to submit as seeing the reason and ground of submission.--Hence, the bare consideration that God is God, may well be sufficient to still all objections and opposition against the divine sovereign dispensations."⁶⁶ God's dealings with his creatures are reasonable, and in the end they will appear so to men. There is a man's particular judgment at death, in which "the sins of the wicked, and the righteousness of the saints, are brought by God to the view of their consciences, so that they know the reason of the sentence given, and their consciences are made to testify to the justice of it."⁶⁷

Beginning with revealed doctrine, he undertook first to show that it was Scriptural, then brought the logic of reason to its support in an effort to make the doctrine so impressive that the hearer could not possibly turn a deaf

⁶⁶ Edwards, "The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty," Works, op. cit., II, 107.

⁶⁷ Edwards, "The World Judged Righteously by Jesus Christ," Works, op. cit., II, 191. Italics not in the original.

or indifferent ear to it. These were tools with which the preacher strove to impart to his congregation a "real sense" of divine things, as contrasted with a mere mingling of words.

There is no doubt a connection between Edwards the rationalist and the varied types of free thinking that have developed since his day; and if he bears blame for the abuses of unrestrained reasoning, he also shares credit for the attainments of a guided rationalism.

Thinkers of today who have no patience with Edwards' theology may yet respect the acuteness of his mind. Rationalists may study with interest and profit the closely-knit arguments of Edwards, bearing in mind that to him rationalism was not to judge Scripture, but to support it--a statement which is true of Edwards, even though others eventually came to use reasonableness as a test for Scripture itself. Those who begin with far different premises than those which formed the fulcrum of Edwards' thought may nevertheless appreciate the force of his reasonings to those who accepted the premises.

Here, then, is another of his distinctions and another key to his effectiveness as an evangelistic preacher. The force of arguments irrefutable to those who believed his premises is obvious; and his being, as Stowe says, the first to apply rationalistic methods to the accepted doctrines of religion helps to distinguish him from other preachers of

his period and to account for his unusual success.

IV. THE PLACE OF EMOTION

Edwards purposely appealed to the emotions of his congregation. This is not to say that he appealed to the emotions rather than to the intellect. That preachers have done so, thousands of times, no one could doubt; but in Edwards' ministry there is an almost total lack of the stories, anecdotes, and human-interest experiences that sometimes displace intellectual content in what has come to be regarded as typically evangelistic sermons. Edwards' appeal was through the intellect to the emotions. People were not stirred emotionally by devices of the preacher but were led by the weight of content to feel strongly its import.

In his work entitled Reason and Emotion, John Macmurray contends that we make a false distinction between the two when we assume that the emotional life cannot be reasonable.

Now the obvious difference between science on the one hand and art and religion on the other is that science is intellectual while art and religion are peculiarly bound up with the emotional side of human life. They are not primarily intellectual. This at once forces us to conclude that there must be an emotional expression of reason as well as an intellectual one. Thinking is obviously not the only capacity which is characteristically human and personal.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ John Macmurray, Reason and Emotion (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1935), p. 19.

There is another capacity, the emotional one, which neither Macmurray nor Edwards desired to overlook.

The tide of revival rose, fell, and rose again, and the preacher looked upon it as being a part of the providence of God, recognizing that there were periods when it was evidently easier for persons to come to a heart knowledge of God than at other times. He used his preaching opportunities to encourage revival, and sought to make the fullest utilization of religious interest when it was running high; but he recognized that such periods were not directly under the control of the preacher and did not undertake to prolong them artificially by fanning frayed emotions.

The fact that he appealed to the emotional life need not be stressed, because the sermon by which many know him who know nothing else about him is one which caused many of its hearers at Enfield to grip their pews and cry out in terror.

Emotional response to preaching in early eighteenth century America was not confined to Northampton and Enfield, nor was it even primarily connected with Edwards. The greatest disturbances took place in the huge outdoor meetings of George Whitefield. Describing one such meeting, at Fagg's Manor in 1740, Whitefield wrote:

Look where I would, most were drowned in Tears. The Word was sharper than a two-edged Sword, and their bitter Cries and Groans were enough to pierce the

hardest Heart. Oh what different Visages were then to be seen? Some were struck pale as Death, others wringing their hands, others lying on the Ground, others sinking into the Arms of their Friends, and most lifting up their Eyes toward Heaven, and crying out to God. I could think of nothing, when I looked at them, so much as the Great Day.⁶⁹ They seemed like Persons awakened by the last Trump.

Interestingly, Whitefield had looked with disfavor upon such manifestations until they began to occur under his own ministry. In the summer of 1739 he had written to John Wesley, criticizing the mass hysteria that Wesley's preaching was eliciting:

I cannot think it right in you to give so much encouragement to those convulsions which people have been thrown into, under your ministry. Was I to do so, how many would cry out every night? I think it is tempting God to require such signs. That there is something of God in it, I doubt not. But the devil, I believe, does interpose. I think it will encourage the French Prophets, take people from the written word, and make them depend on visions, convulsions, &c., more than on the promises and precepts of the Gospels. Honored Sir, how could you tell that some who came to you "were in a good measure sanctified." What fruits could be produced in one night's time?⁷⁰

The spirit which he had censured in Wesley's hearers, however, appeared somewhat different to Whitefield when his own auditors reacted with uncontrolled emotion and sometimes with violence.

Great as the turbulence was in England, under Wesley

⁶⁹ Stuart C. Henry, George Whitefield, Wayfaring Witness (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 63.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

and Whitefield, it was even greater in America during Whitefield's tours of the Colonies. These people were, in part, the same population to which Edwards preached, although under different conditions. It is not too surprising that, during times of revival, people who responded so violently to the appeals of the contemporary evangelists should also respond emotionally to Edwards.

Yet Edwards' preaching was quite different, both in style and in content, from that of Wesley and Whitefield. In his early years he read all of his sermons, and even after Whitefield's visit inspired him to speak more extemporaneously he used notes, most of them finely scribbled on small scraps of paper. Although his voice, quiet and controlled, had a penetrating quality, and although his eyes were not so glued to the page that they could not survey the congregation seated before him, one must look more to the subject matter of his messages than to his style for an explanation of their effect upon the emotions.

He packed his sermons full of Scripture (and of inferences drawn from Scripture) and of finely drawn logical arguments that left his hearers no escape as they followed him from point to point until they were led to the very brink of despair, with no hope save in Christ. Or, using the same method, he spoke of the excellencies of Christ, holding first one and then another before his congregation until,

in times of revival, they were captivated by Christ's attractiveness.

Macmurray says:

We can acknowledge . . . without any difficulty, that feelings can be rational or irrational in precisely the same way as thoughts, through the correctness or incorrectness of their reference to reality. In thinking thoughts we think the things to which the thoughts refer. In feeling emotions we feel the things to which the emotions refer. And, therefore, we can feel rightly or wrongly.⁷¹

The reality of the human situation, as Edwards saw it revealed in Scripture and confirmed in his own understanding, called for a suitable response in the hearts of men. To him it would be irrational to encourage a sense of well-being in a person estranged from God or to be content with anything less than a consuming love in one who has experienced his redemption. Intellectual knowledge is cold if it does not affect the emotions. He would say with Macmurray, "The emotional life is our life."⁷²

If we limit awareness so that it merely feeds the intellect with the material for thought, our actions will be intellectually determined. They will be mechanical, planned, thought-out. Our sensitiveness is being limited to a part of ourselves--the brain in particular--and, therefore, we will act only with part of ourselves, at least so far as our actions are consciously and rationally determined. If, on the other hand, we live in awareness, seeking the full development of our sensibility to the world, we shall soak ourselves in the

⁷¹ Macmurray, op. cit., p. 25.

⁷² Ibid., p. 75.

life of the world around us; with the result that we shall act with the whole of ourselves.⁷³

The word "sensibility" used above by Macmurray appears continually in Edwards' writing, and the similarity of thought extends far beyond the chance use of the same word. Edwards' preaching was aimed at the heart, at the springs of action, and he endeavored to reach the heart through the mind. The balance between the two he illustrated by means of a lamp, which gives off both light and heat. Heat without light he defined as "enthusiasm." Light without heat would be powerless to move the heart toward God.

Edwards early appreciated the importance of the emotional life. His Notes on the Mind, dating back probably to his college days, include these brief observations which he jotted down as seed for further thought:

(6) Why it is proper for Orators and Preachers to move the Passions--needful to show earnestness, etc. How this tends to convince the judgment, and many other ways is good and absolutely necessary.

(7) Of the nature of affections or Passions--how only strong and lively exercises of the Will, together with the effect on the Animal nature. . . .

(9) Concerning Enthusiasm, Inspiration, Grace, etc.⁷⁴

Many years later, in reporting upon the revival move-

⁷³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁷⁴ Edwards, "The Mind," Works, op. cit., I, cclvii.

ment in his church at Northampton, he marshalled Scripture to the support of "earnest and passionate preaching," and defended the use of "terror" as merely holding further light to those who seek the way.⁷⁵

Preaching, he felt, is more adapted to impressing the heart than is reading:

And therefore it does not answer the aim which God had in this institution (preaching), merely for men to have good commentaries and expositions of Scripture and good books of divinity; because, although they may tend, as well as preaching, to give a good doctrinal or speculative understanding of the word of God, yet they have not an equal tendency to impress them on men's hearts and affections.⁷⁶

Certainly the preaching of Edwards was attended with more warmth of feeling than accompanies the reading of commentaries!

Even preaching sometimes fails to awaken the ungodly; but they will not remain forever untouched, for God will confront them at the final judgment.

Now ministers often tell sinners of the great importance of an interest in Christ, and that that is the one thing needful. They are also told the folly of delaying the care of their souls, and how much it concerns them to improve their opportunity. But the

⁷⁵ Jonathan Edwards, A Narrative of the Revival of Religion . . . (Glasgo: Printed for Wm. Collins, 1829), p. 208.

⁷⁶ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 242.

instructions of ministers does not convince them; therefore God will undertake to convince them.⁷⁷

Such a statement, climaxing a sermon entitled "Future Punishment of the Wicked," is clearly calculated to awaken an emotional response.

At the very close of his ministry at Northampton, in his farewell sermon, he summarized in a sentence that which had been his constant goal in evangelism: "I have diligently endeavored to find out and use the most powerful motives to persuade you to take care for your own welfare and salvation."⁷⁸

Perhaps this diligent use of "the most powerful motives" is a distinguishing mark of all truly evangelistic preaching. Charles B. Templeton writes:

Christian truth is not something merely to be understood; it is something to which one responds. Detached speculation about certain ethical premises may serve religion well but not Christianity. The Christian preacher does not simply say, "This is the truth"; he goes on to say, "This is the truth--how will you respond to it?" He is preaching for a verdict.⁷⁹

The emotion to be awakened, and to which all others were to be subservient, was love to God; and manifestations

⁷⁷ Edwards, "Future Punishment of the Wicked," Works, op. cit., II, 79.

⁷⁸ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, ccxxix.

⁷⁹ Charles B. Templeton, Evangelism for Tomorrow (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 135.

of feeling which did not eventually issue in that all-important emotion were looked upon by Edwards as delusions. This subject has already been discussed under the heading of Edwards' conception of the conversion experience.

Several times in this section Macmurray has been quoted as sharing and expressing an insight held in common with Edwards, that emotion is not necessarily irrational. Actually, the two made quite opposite uses of the insight. Macmurray advocated the education of the emotional life by allowing it to mature and take form without being thwarted and stunted by social restrictions. Edwards also sought to educate the emotional life, but by presenting to it powerfully and unmistakably the revealed will of God to which the individual, with God's help, was to make the proper emotional response. Macmurray's thrust is for the development of personality, Edwards' for submission, from the heart, to God as Sovereign. The one encouraged the liberating of personality, trusting it to develop into something fine; the other, looking upon the human heart as "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9), saw a pattern revealed in Scripture and confirmed in nature and undertook to train the emotions to respond in a suitable--a reasonable--way to God.

The effort to produce a desired emotion was very vigorous. A close twentieth century parallel in this

effort is the young American evangelist, Billy Graham. The similarity between the two is evidenced by the fact that Graham, running out of prepared sermons in his Los Angeles, California, campaign in 1949 when it was extended beyond his expectations, stood in the huge revival tent and delivered Jonathan Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"!

The Rev. William S. Tindal, Professor of philosophical and systematic theology at New College, Edinburgh, heard Graham speak in London and in Scotland, and wrote: "I myself felt that he brought too much pressure upon people to come forward, and that there is a good deal of bludgeon work in what he does. . . . As I listened to his Good Friday address I kept asking myself how far he really had a proper reverence for the souls of other people."⁸⁰

The same criticism could be directed toward Edwards, with greater emphasis. He strenuously endeavored to destroy the self-confidence of his listeners, to make them feel their utter lostness, and to bring them into abject submission to the mere good-pleasure of God. Then, against that background, he preached to them the sovereign grace of God and sought to lead them to an appreciation of his mercy.

It is the prerogative of God to use imperfect men

⁸⁰ The Rev. Professor William S. Tindal, of New College, in a personal letter dated 11th April, 1955.

and imperfect methods to carry out his purposes, else they would never be accomplished; and Professor Tindal wrote that he sensed during the Graham campaign "a movement of the Spirit in the country."⁸¹ Professor James Stewart wrote of Graham's London campaign: "I am convinced that, even though we might differ theologically at some points, his is a real movement of the Spirit of God."⁸²

Much as one might deplore Edwards' use of "terror," his ultimate desire to awaken a love for God in the hearts of his hearers was commendable, and there is nothing fundamentally wrong with seeking an emotional, as well as an intellectual, response. "The gospel is to be addressed to the whole man (intellect, emotions, and will)."⁸³

V. THE FUNCTION OF PRAYER

Certain aspects of Edwards' preaching have been observed--his use of Lockean psychology, his appeal to the authenticity of Scripture, his employment of reason, and his appeal to emotion--as "tools" in his efforts to lead people to a conversion experience. Something needs to be said also about the "atmosphere" in which his sermons were

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The Rev. Professor James S. Stewart, of New College, in a personal letter dated 7th July, 1954.

⁸³ Templeton, op. cit., p. 81.

delivered. Prayer had its place in the revivals.

In the autumn [of 1734], Mr. Edwards recommended to the young people, on the day of each stated public lecture, to assemble in various parts of the town, and spend the evening in prayer, and the other duties of social religion. This they readily did, and their example was followed by those who were older.

The solemnity of mind, which now began to pervade the church and congregation, and which was constantly increasing, had a visible re-action on all the labours of Mr. Edwards, public as well as private; and it will not be easy to find discourses in any language, more solemn, spiritual, or powerful, than many of those which he now delivered.⁸⁴

One of the discourses to which Dwight refers is the sermon on "A Divine and Supernatural Light . . .," which was preached at this crucial time and has already been mentioned. The important sermons on "Justification by Faith Alone" were also delivered at this time in a spiritual atmosphere generated by prayer.

An illustration of the effect upon a preacher of strong congregational backing is found in the experience of Alexander Whyte, noted minister of Free Saint George's, Edinburgh, and one-time principal of New College. His biographer tells us that when Whyte was appointed missionary at Kinnoir and took up his abode in Huntly,

The whole atmosphere of the place, the warmth with which he was received and the thoroughness with which his evangelistic work was supported and followed up by

⁸⁴ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lxxxiv.

a group of young men and women in Kinnoir, gave a new uplift to his spirit, the effect of which remained with him throughout life. In later years he told the most ardent of his fellow-workers, John Lobban, that these meetings had made him what he afterwards became.⁸⁵

The willingness of young people, and, following their example, of others in meeting regularly for concerted prayer noticeably strengthened the preaching of Edwards and prepared the congregation for his messages.

Edwards did not write a great deal about his personal prayer life, as compared with some of his noted contemporaries. He did not relate how many hours he spent in prayer each morning, as did Wesley, nor did he leave a day-by-day account of his spiritual exultations and depressions, as did Brainerd. The appeals for prayer did not echo throughout his sermons, as they sometimes do in present-day evangelistic missions.

Schafer feels that that does not indicate a lack of appreciation of the importance of prayer, but rather a healthy attitude toward it--that his personal communion with God was not cheapened by frequent public reference and that his concept of prayer was not compartmentalized, as though one prays and then does something else. Instead, Schafer feels that Edwards looked upon life in its wholeness as

⁸⁵ G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, D. D. (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1925), p. 96.

as a continuous interaction between himself and God.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, there are specific references in Edwards' writings to prayer. In recording, some twenty years later, his spiritual experience in College, he wrote:

I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent. . . . I had great longings for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world; and my secret prayers used to be, in great part, taken up in praying for it. . . . I very frequently used to retire into a solitary place, on the banks of Hudson's river, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things and secret converse with God.⁸⁷

In a sermon preached in 1749, at the ordination of a fellow minister, Edwards urged:

More particularly should Ministers of the Gospel follow the Example of their great Master, in the Manner in which they seek the salvation and Happiness of the Souls of Men. They should follow his Example of Love to Souls . . . should have the same Spirit of Love to them, and Concern for their Salvation. . . . Ministers should imitate their great Master in his fervent Prayers for the good of the souls of men.⁸⁸

As to the actual function of prayer, he wrote:

It is manifest, we are not appointed, in this duty, to declare God's perfections, his majesty, holiness, goodness, and all-sufficiency; our own meanness, emptiness, dependence, and unworthiness, our wants and desires, in order to inform God of these things, or to

⁸⁶ Thomas A. Schafer, in personal interview, August, 1957.

⁸⁷ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lv-lvi.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Edwards, Christ the Great Example of Gospel Ministers (Boston: Printed and sold by T. Fleet, 1750), pp. 10-12.

incline his heart, and prevail with him to be willing to show us mercy, but rather suitably to affect our own hearts with the things we express, and so to prepare us to receive the blessings we ask.⁸⁹

In an "Affectionate Address to Young Christians," intended to help new converts make an "honorable profession of faith in Jesus," Edwards advocated a "careful and daily study of the Holy Scriptures," and urged that "maintaining the spirit of prayer is also of essential importance in the Christian life."⁹⁰ "Keeping much retired and by ourselves," for personal communion with God, he also recommended as "most profitable for us all," citing as examples the prayer life of Moses, Elijah, Daniel, John the Baptist, and Christ.

The farewell sermon at Northampton included another exhortation to prayer:

Another thing which I would advise to, that you may hereafter be a prosperous people, is, that you would give yourselves much to prayer.

God is the fountain of all blessing and prosperity, and he will be sought to for his blessing. I would therefore advise you not only to be constant in secret and family prayer, and in the public worship of God in his house, but also often to assemble yourselves in private praying societies. I would advise all such as are grieved for the afflictions of Joseph, and sensibly affected with the calamities of this town, of whatever

⁸⁹ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 242.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, "Affectionate Address to Young Christians," College Pamphlets (in Rare Book Room, Yale University Library), Vol. 2035, p. 3.

opinion they be with relation to the subject of our late controversy, often to meet together for prayer, and cry to God for his mercy to themselves, and mercy to this town, and mercy to Zion and the people of God in general through the world.⁹¹

On the backs of some of Edwards' notes on miscellaneous subjects, as the manuscripts appear in the Yale Collection, there appear requests for prayer in the handwriting of those members of the congregation requesting it. Evidently, there was a custom in Northampton of turning in on slips of paper personal requests, that were then included in public prayer and retained by the minister for his private intercession and probably commended to the congregation for continued prayer. The requests are varied, dignified but specific. Several choice ones appear below:

Ebenezer Miller and his Children desire the prayers of God's people for his wife and their mother that is bereaved of her understanding that God would restore her understanding to her again if it be his will if outhur wayes fit them for his holy will.

Benjamin Bartlet Desires the Prayers of the Congregation for his youngest child that is Dangerously Sick that God will be Pleased to Direct to and Bless means for its restoration if it be his will otherwise that he and his child may be fitted for God's holy will and pleasure. Jonathan Strong Jnr and his wife Desire the same they having the care of the Child.

John Parsons and His wife Desires the Continuance of prayers for Him that still remains under Dangerous Circumstances: (and is coming by near his End) that

⁹¹ Edwards, "A Farewell Sermon," Works, op. cit., I, ccxlix.

God would Direct to and Bless means for his Recovery. But Especially that God would Grant to him much of his Blessed presence: and fit Him and all Relations for his sovereign will.⁹²

Edwards saved these slips and, later, used the backs of them for miscellaneous notes. Thus the prayer requests happened to be preserved.

One may safely say that, whatever measure of genuine spiritual life came to Northampton during the Awakenings, it would not have come without prayer and that the man in the pulpit was thoroughly aware of that fact.

Thus, through the use of sensational psychology, Scripture, reason, and emotion, and in an atmosphere of prayer, Edwards worked mightily to communicate to his congregation the heart-felt experience, the unselfish love for God, which was the essence of his own conversion to Christ. As Miller says:

Edwards was infinitely more than a theologian. He was one of America's five or six major artists, who happened to work with ideas instead of with poems or novels. He was much more a psychologist and a poet than a logician, and though he devoted his genius to topics derived from the body of divinity--the will, virtue, sin--he treated them in the manner of the very finest speculators, in the manner of Augustine, Aquinas, and Pascal, as problems not of dogma but of life.⁹³

⁹² Yale University Library, Edwards MSS, fol. XLI.

⁹³ Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Solane Associates, 1949), p. xli.

VI. THE DISCIPLINE OF CONVERTS

While the discipline of converts does not pertain exactly to the technique of evangelism in the sense of winning converts, it is so closely associated with that work that it merits attention. Every discussion of evangelism turns eventually to the subject of "follow-up" work, that which is done to encourage the growth of those who have professed conversion. No one is or should be satisfied with the work of an evangelist until he has received an answer to the question, "What does he do to insure the development of his converts?"

The first consideration in this connection is that Edwards was not primarily an itinerant evangelist. He preached regularly to the same congregation. While he had, during the periods of revival in New England, many invitations to preach in other churches, most of his revival preaching was from the Northampton pulpit. This places him in a different category from the evangelist who travels from place to place, winning "converts" and then of necessity leaving them behind to be cared for by others or not at all. Most of those who professed faith under Edwards' preaching remained his charges in the Northampton congregation. Their nurture was a part of his regular ministry.

That ministry included admonitions against the evils fostered by the revivals, which Edwards listed as spiritual pride, dependence upon immediate revelation to the neglect of Scripture, a mixture of the natural and corrupt with the genuine spiritual experience, a censuring of others, an assumption of too much authority by lay exhorters, and an irreverent informality in the conduct of worship.⁹⁴ It included also exhortations to honesty, to the avoiding of temptation, to the right use of time, and to purity in heart and life. The discipline of converts was not carried on as a separate follow-up program covering a limited length of time but was a constant urging of the Christian life upon new and old converts as a part of the on-going church program.

A second consideration is that Edwards sternly disciplined himself. While he may not in every sense be considered one of his own converts, yet undoubtedly the standard he set for himself was that which he had in mind for those who accepted Christ under his ministry.

Dated entries in his diary begin in 1723, when he was twenty years of age. By that time he had formulated a set of seventy resolutions for the regulation of his

⁹⁴ Edwards, "Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England," Works, op. cit., I, 398-419.

own heart and life.

1. Resolved, That I will do whatsoever I think to be most to the glory of God, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration; without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. . . . 4. Resolved, Never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God, nor be, nor suffer it, if I can possibly avoid it. . . . 16. Resolved, Never to speak evil of any one, so that it shall tend to his dishonour, more or less, upon no account except for some real good. . . . 20. Resolved, to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking. . . . 42. Resolved, Frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which was made at my baptism, which I solemnly renewed when I was received into the communion of the church, and which I have solemnly re-made this 12th day of January, 1723. 43. Resolved, Never, henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's. . . . 46. Resolved, Never to allow the least measure of any fretting or uneasiness at my father or mother. . . . 56. Resolved, Never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be. . . . 58. Resolved, Not only to refrain from an air of dislike, fretfulness, and anger in conversation, but to exhibit an air of love, cheerfulness, and benignity. . . . 66. Resolved, That I will endeavour always to keep a benign aspect, and air of acting and speaking, in all places, and in all companies, except it should so happen that duty requires otherwise.⁹⁵

Other resolutions had to do with his use of time. He regulated his eating, sleeping and other personal habits in a way that he felt would keep his mind and body in peak condition for his work. Whenever a thought came to him which he felt was worthy of investigation, he wrote it down so that he might not lose it. Neither his friends nor his foes

⁹⁵ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, lxiii-iv.

cast any shadow upon his disciplined, devoted personal life.

Finally, his efforts to discipline young people in the congregation were a contributing factor in his discharge from the Northampton pulpit, as stated in Chapter I. His watchful eye surveyed not only the church but the whole community with a zeal for maintaining righteous living as well as a credible profession of faith.

Discipline was projected from the pulpit, through personal interviews, and, when he felt the occasion required it, by public censure in church courts.

CHAPTER VII

SIGNIFICANCE OF EDWARDS, THE EVANGELIST

The salient points of Edwards' evangelistic effort have been presented--his passion for the glory of God, his concern for the salvation of the lost, his conception of what the conversion experience involves, and the means by which he sought to bring people to that experience. The significance of his effort, in terms of his own day and in terms of succeeding generations, remains to be discussed.

I. CONFLICTING OPINIONS ABOUT HIM

Dwight, writing in 1830, described the 1734-35 revival in Northampton as "undoubtedly one of the most remarkable events of its kind, that has occurred since the canon of the New Testament was finished."¹

It continued to exist in various sections of the country, to the east, the south, and the west, during the five following years. By the astonishing work of grace at Northampton, an impulse had been given to the churches of the whole western world, which could not soon be lost. The history of that event, having been extensively circulated, had produced a general conviction in the minds of Christians, that the preaching of the gospel might be attended by effects, not less surprising, than those which followed it in apostolic

¹ Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A. M., ed. Edward Hickman (London: Ball, Arnold, and Co., 1840), I, lxxxv.

times.²

Under the heading of "Evangelism" in the Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Dawson Bryan cites just two of its exponents as outstanding examples: "Jonathan Edwards and Dwight L. Moody were among the great evangelists."³

Kuiper mentions that "the name of Jonathan Edwards is inseparably linked with the Great Awakening in New England," and goes on to say that "in many ways Jonathan Edwards was the outstanding intellectual figure in colonial America, and one of the greatest minds America has ever produced."⁴

Spiller, thinking especially of Edwards' unwillingness to compromise with relaxed spiritual standards of church membership, observes:

For the moment he seemed an isolated reactionary, lost to the times because he would not compromise with them. Need religion be more than regular church attendance, profession of a reasoned belief in godly living based on good breeding and humanitarian interests in the welfare of one's neighbors? Edwards thought it should be. He was ready to express himself in a series

² Ibid., p. xciii.

³ Dawson C. Bryan, "Evangelism," Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Lefferts A. Loetscher (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955), I, 406.

⁴ B. K. Kuiper, The Church in History (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 419.

of independent metaphysical speculations which have in fact given permanent direction to spiritual culture in America.⁵

Spiller might also have said, in a series of pointed sermons.

Another twentieth century writer says that "as the first, and certainly the greatest, American Calvinist, and as the leading philosopher here before William James, his place in American cultural history is permanently secure."⁶

Winslow describes him as a genius, a well-balanced one:

No one who studies the life of Jonathan Edwards deeply can miss the certainty that genius in him, whatever its hereditary basis, was built upon the firm structure of an essentially sound and healthy personality. Not at any time in his stormy career is there the slightest hint of either mental or emotional instability.

.....

The delicately adjusted balance in him between the intellectual and the spiritual, the dynamic quality behind the intellectual and spiritual powers, and the intense innermost loyalties of his nature have no parallels in his known heritage. Genius by any definition would not require that they should.⁷

⁵ Robert E. Spiller and others, Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 74.

⁶ Thomas H. Johnson, The Printed Writings of Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. vii.

⁷ Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. 20, 26.

J. Carter Swaim, executive director of the department of the English Bible in the Christian education division of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A., in a book just off the press, points to Edwards as an early example of ministers who were effective in the "cure of souls."

Clergymen of a later age were interested in the sum total of human behavior. Jonathan Edwards is best known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," but that sermon was not characteristic of his ministry. Edwards was a scientist who always wanted to know why things were as they were. . . . He was keenly interested in his own inner world, and undertook to analyze his dreams in order to discover "what are the nature, circumstances, principles, and ends of my imaginary actions and passions in them."

If this sounds strangely like psychoanalysis, it has to be said that it was his concern about the truths of the Bible which led Edwards into all such observation. Preachers in years gone by had not our modern knowledge of psychiatry, but their ministry was effective in the cure of souls because they knew their Bibles. . . . They "lack the modern psychological techniques but they know human nature and touch its faults and failures with uncanny insight."⁸

Innumerable statements could be introduced to demonstrate an increasing awareness of and appreciation of Edwards' work, such as this from Perry Miller: "The American mind is immeasurably the poorer that he was not permitted

⁸ J. Carter Swaim, Body, Soul and Spirit (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957), p. 5, citing Gaius Glenn Atkins, Master Sermons of the Nineteenth Century.

to bring into order his accumulated meditations."⁹

Not all comments about Edwards, however, have been complimentary. Some have soundly denounced his work, and for every critical thought published there doubtless have been scores left unexpressed or expressed only by the ignoring of his writings.

Some of his contemporaries, influential ministers in Boston and Cambridge, were advocating a more liberal theology than Edwards was willing to support, and Edwards' interest in revivals and his support of the evangelist Whitefield drew down upon him the outspoken condemnation of Charles Chauncey, who "violently opposed such 'New Lightism,' and answered Edwards' Some Thoughts on Revivals, in 1742, with his testy 'Seasonable Thoughts,'"¹⁰ "The only professor of divinity in New England during the second quarter of the century was Edward Wigglesworth, of Harvard, a bitter opponent of Whitefield."¹¹

A striking expression of opposition is found in an essay by Oliver Wendell Holmes, published in 1880. It begins on a note complimentary of his personal life:

⁹ Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," Harvard Theological Review, XLI (1948), 124.

¹⁰ Thomas H. Johnson, op. cit., p. vii.

¹¹ Ibid.

The feeling which naturally arises in contemplating the character of Jonathan Edwards is that of deep reverence for a man who seems to have been anointed from his birth; who lived a life pure, laborious, self-denying, occupied with the highest themes, and busy in the highest kind of labor, such a life as in another church might have given him a place in the 'Acta Sanctorum.'¹²

Holmes then, in the remainder of his address, gives expression to a strong reaction against Calvinism as preached by Edwards, which doubtless was shared by a great many of Holmes contemporaries: "Edwards' system seems, in the light of today, to the last degree barbaric, mechanical, materialistic, pessimistic. If he had lived a hundred years later and breathed the air of freedom, he could not have written with such old-world barbarism as we find in his volcanic sermons."¹³

He also refers to "the worse than heathen conceptions which had so long enchained his [Edwards'] powerful, but crippled understanding,"¹⁴ and says:

His great powers were under some misguided influence. The truth is that the whole system of beliefs which came in with the story of the "fall of man," the curse of the father of the race conveyed by natural descent to his posterity, the casting of the responsibility of death and all the disorders of creation upon the unfortunate being who found them a part of the arrangements of the

¹² Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Jonathan Edwards, An Essay," International Review, July, 1880, p. 4.

¹³ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

universe when he first made his appearance, is gently fading out of the enlightened human intelligence, and we are hardly in a condition to realize what a tyranny it once exerted over many of the strongest minds. . . .¹⁵

There is no sufficient reason for attacking the motives of a man so saintly in life, so holy in aspirations, so patient, so meek, so laborious, so thoroughly in earnest in the work to which his life was given. But after long smothering in the sulphurous atmosphere of his thought one cannot help asking, Was this or anything like this,--is this or anything like this,--the accepted belief of any considerable part of Protestantism? If so, we must say with Bacon, "It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of Him." A "natural man" is better than an unnatural theologian. It is a less violence to our nature to deify protoplasm than it is to diabolize the Deity.¹⁶

Had Holmes lived seventy years later, and had he looked at Edwards not from the proud heights of human progress but from the humbled and frightened position of the modern man who stands upon the rubble of two world wars and is dwarfed by the long shadows of atomic stockpiles, he might have found the old emphasis upon man's sin more acceptable, and certainly more realistic.

As to the relationship of the pro and con opinions about Edwards, the trend of our times in America is to look more favorably upon him. This does not mean that there is mass adoption of his theology or of his manner of preaching, but that Americans are recognizing him as a giant from whom

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

much can be learned. Perry Miller's statement in his book, Jonathan Edwards, is an instance:

May I add that, if to show him for what he was, the presentation seems too eagerly to take his part in order to overcome the prejudice against him which certainly exists, it is not out of partisanship for his creed. It is rather out of a sincere conviction that a major American must be appreciated for his greatness, and upon the assumption that an ability so to estimate a man, regardless of our personal beliefs, along with an adequate documentation of his temporal and personal circumstances, is one test of a truly great America.¹⁷

Another illustration of renewed appreciation is the fact that a new article upon Edwards, more sympathetic toward him than the one now appearing in the Encyclopaedia Britannica has already been prepared by Thomas A. Schafer for publication in the next edition.

In August of 1957 the librarian in charge of the Rare Book Room of Yale University Library said in a personal interview that most of the work being done in that section of the library was on the works of two men, Jonathan Edwards and one other, and that Edwards was commanding more attention than anyone else.

A new edition of his works is being prepared, under the general editorship of Perry Miller. Volume I of this edition, edited by Paul Ramsey, Professor of Religion at

¹⁷ Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Solane Associates, 1949), p. xiv.

Princeton University, came off the press in 1957 and drew this comment from Kenneth J. Foreman, Professor of Doctrinal Theology, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Kentucky: "Here is Calvinism in one of its most distinguished representatives, living almost exactly halfway between Calvin's time and ours. . . . Whether one agrees with Edwards wholly, in part, or not at all (if such there be), however, all will agree that this Christian scholar commands respect, and deserves honest study."¹⁸

A book entitled Jonathan Edwards, the Preacher, by Ralph G. Turnbull of Seattle, Washington, is to be published this spring (1958), coinciding with the two-hundredth anniversary of Edwards' death. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company is releasing this summer Jonathan Edwards on Evangelism, by J. C. Wolf (an anthology-digest), and Jonathan Edwards' sermon Outlines, by Sheldon B. Quincer.

II. EDWARDS' OWN CRITIQUE OF THE AWAKENING

One factor contributing to the confusion about Edwards and his significance to the field of evangelism is the fact that all of the ills of the Great Awakening have been popularly attributed to him. Actually, while he was its intellec-

¹⁸ Kenneth J. Foreman, "Jonathan Edwards," The Presbyterian Outlook, CXL (January 6, 1958), 15.

tual leader, Edwards did not approve of many things that took place in the course of the Awakening or even in the course of the revivals that took place in Northampton under his own supervision. It will therefore be helpful in estimating his significance to differentiate between that of which he approved and that of which he disapproved.

The criticisms which have been advanced against Edwards down through the years naturally lose some of their force when one finds them expressed, in a wonderfully incisive way, in Edwards' own evaluation of the revivals! Edwards' critique appears principally in four of his works: "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," "Narrative of Surprising Conversions," "Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England," and "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God." His evaluation of the Awakening may be summarized as follows:

In the first place, he looked upon it as a genuine work of the Spirit of God, for three reasons: (1) Its "agreeableness" to Scripture:

Is it not strange that in a Christian country, and such a land of light as this is, there are many at a loss to conclude whose work this is, whether the work of God or the work of the devil? Is it not a shame to New England that such a work should be much doubted of here? . . . but we have a rule near at hand, a sacred book that God himself has put into our hands, with clear and infallible marks, sufficient to resolve us in these things; which book I think we must reject, not only in some particular passages, but in the substance of it, if we reject such a work as has now

been described, as not being the work of God. The whole tenor of the gospel proves it; all the notion of religion that the Scripture gives us confirms it.¹⁹

(2) Its practical effects: The revivals appeared to Edwards to have had these results: upon the Indians who, in the rapid spread of the awakening, came under the preaching of the Gospel, a reformation from their besetting sin, drunkenness; upon others, as he observed:

The divine power of this work has marvellously appeared in some instances I have been acquainted with; in supporting and fortifying the heart under great trials, such as the death of children, and extreme pain of body; and in wonderfully maintaining the serenity, calmness, and joy of the soul, in an immovable rest in God, and sweet resignation to him. And some under the blessed influences of this work have, in a calm, bright, and joyful frame of mind, been carried through the valley of the shadow of death.²⁰

Young people, who had previously turned a deaf ear to ministers and magistrates alike, now "of themselves" forsook their "frolicking, vain company-keeping, night-walking, their mirth and jollity, their impure language, and lewd songs." There was a "great alteration" among old and young as to "drinking, tavern-haunting, profane speaking, and extravagance in apparel."

Many notoriously vicious persons have been reformed, and become externally quite new creatures. Some that

¹⁹ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England," Works, op. cit., I, 375.

²⁰ Ibid.

were wealthy, and of a fashionable, gay education; some great beaux and fine ladies, that seemed to have their minds swallowed up with nothing but the vain shows and pleasures of the world, have been wonderfully altered, have relinquished these vanities, and are become serious, mortified, and humble in their conversation.²¹

Perry Miller gives this summation of Edwards' interpretation of the effects of the Awakening--in particular, the 1734-35 revival:

In spite of Satan, Edwards was confident. A religious disposition was still, in 1736, evident in the town; no young person--the crucial test--had returned to extravagance, and "God has evidently made us a new people." Experience vindicated psychology; allowing everything for natural or mechanical causes, for the peculiarities of the town or for Abigail's consumption, the experience had been real, and after discounting all "distempers," the scientist could declare "this amazing work, as it appeared to me, to be indeed divine."²²

(3) Its "unaccountableness" upon human grounds:

Some of the ministers chiefly employed, have been mere babes in age and standing; and some of them not so high in reputation among their brethren as many others; and God has suffered their infirmities to appear in the sight of others, so as much to displease them; and at the same time it has pleased God greatly to succeed them, while he has not so succeeded others who are generally reputed vastly their superiors. . . . He has poured contempt on all that human strength, wisdom, prudence, and sufficiency which men have been wont to trust, and to glory in.²³

The very fact that some men and methods, most promising

²¹ Ibid., p. 374.

²² Miller, Jonathan Edwards, op. cit., p. 141.

²³ Edwards, "Some Thoughts concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England," Works, op. cit., I, 367.

from a human standpoint, failed to impress their hearers while humbler instruments were greatly used, argued to Edwards a divine power in the revivals.

In the second place, Edwards recognized and opposed many excesses and abuses. This is extremely important because it means that a host of objections that have been raised against his ministry down through the years are not objections to him and his theory and practice of evangelism, but are indorsements of objections that he himself raised.

Considering the fact that Edwards was a central figure in the Awakening, the objectivity with which he viewed it is amazing. He "made no secret of why he could maintain detachment from events in which he was deeply implicated: he had a technique for analysis, the Lockean psychology. He was as though for the Transactions of the Royal Society."²⁴ The trend of his times, as the excitement of the revivals waxed and waned, was to make emotional manifestations the mark of validity or non-validity in spiritual experience. Laments Edwards:

Thus we easily and naturally run from one extreme to another. A little while ago we were in the other extreme; there was a prevalent disposition to look upon all high religious affections as eminent exercises of true grace, without much inquiry into the nature and source of those affections, and the manner in which they arose. If persons did but appear to be indeed very much moved and

²⁴ Miller, Jonathan Edwards, op. cit., p. 139.

raised, so as to be full of religious talk, and express themselves with great warmth and earnestness, and to be filled, or to be very full, as the phrases were; it was too much the manner, without further examination, to conclude such persons were full of the Spirit of God, and had eminent experience of his gracious influences. This was the extreme which was prevailing three or four years ago. But of late, instead of esteeming and admiring all religious affections, without distinction, it is much more prevalent to reject and discard all without distinction. Herein appears the subtilty of Satan.²⁵

As the revival movement gained momentum in New England it became a subject of controversy. Advocates of revival generally attached great importance to the mere circumstances of conversion, dwelling upon its time, place, and manner, and upon the degree of emotional disturbances attending it. Opponents were inclined to judge entirely by external conduct and to look with suspicion upon anything emotional, attributing it to artificial excitement. The latter could find little to commend in the revivals and the former could find little to condemn.

Edwards differed materially from both of these. He felt, from his own experience, that "sin and the saving grace of God might dwell in the same heart"; and he concluded from observation that "much false religion might prevail during a powerful revival of true religion, and that at such a time, multitudes of hypocrites might spring up

²⁵ Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," Works, op. cit., I, 243.

among real Christians."²⁶ Hence his painstaking treatise on the Religious Affections, defining very carefully what might and what might not be accepted as an indication that a person did have, or did not have, true religion. As was brought out in Chapter V on the subject of Conversion, the gist of the question, in Edwards' mind, was whether or not a person loved God; and the treatise very critically examines supposed religious manifestations to see if they point to that central reality.

A certain amount of insight is required to see that "moving" experiences are not necessarily spiritual ones, and Edwards left no doubt that he possessed such insight. Perhaps more discernment and a greater breadth of understanding and tolerance are required to enable one to look upon violent emotions and bodily reactions and acknowledge that they do not necessarily preclude a genuine spiritual work. Edwards was able to look upon these as no sign that a work was, or was not, of the Spirit of God.

Surprising it is to find the evangelist admitting that he did not believe the majority of his converts were genuine! In a letter written from Stockbridge in 1751 to John Erskine in Scotland, he reported: "I cannot say, that the greater part of supposed converts give reason, by their

²⁶ Edwards, Works, op. cit., I, cxxiv.

conversation, to suppose that they are true converts."²⁷

The lasting results, he believed, were less, proportionately, than in the simultaneous revivals in Scotland. "The proportion may, perhaps, be more truly represented, by the proportion of the blossoms on a tree which abide and come to mature fruit, to the whole number of blossoms in the spring."²⁸

The illustration is helpful, enabling us to see Edwards, the scientist, taking a long-range view of the Awakening, observing clearly its manifold excesses and abuses which have since been objects of criticism, and yet detecting in it a genuine movement of the Spirit of God.

III. CONCLUSION

After "long smothering in the sulphurous atmosphere" of Edwards' thought, to use Holmes' expression, one emerges with the following impressions:

First, that the Edwards who is the subject of this study was not the Edwards of popular opinion. His thought, taken in the broad sweep of it, was not characteristically sulphurous, even though there was the smell of smoke and a wincing from flame when he preached upon the subject of sin and its punishment. As Foreman says, "Jonathan Edwards

²⁷ Ibid., p. clxxii.

²⁸ Ibid.

was not primarily a preacher of hell-fire sermons, not even first of all a preacher. He was a thinker, a philosophical theologian, a scholar, probably America's most original contribution to the world of theology and philosophy."²⁹

Secondly, approval or disapproval of his evangelistic work depends partly upon how one balances the benefits and the abuses of the Great Awakening. One who sees worth in mass evangelism (understanding the term as including a pastor's efforts within his local constituency), or who looks upon it as a valid method under the circumstances of eighteenth century America, will look more favorably upon Edwards than one who feels that the disadvantages of mass evangelism outweigh its benefits.

Moreover, one who agrees with the strongly individualistic emphasis characteristic of revival movements will find more to commend in Edwards than one who desires greater emphasis upon the social aspects of the gospel.

Since it is necessary to decide what attitude one will take toward the revival method of evangelism in general before crystalizing an opinion of one particular revivalist, Barbour's retrospect of the 1859 revival in Scotland may be accepted as giving an excellent perspective also of the American Awakenings:

²⁹ Foreman, "Jonathan Edwards," op. cit., p. 15.

It would be a hard task--and here it is a needless one--to estimate the value of the Revival of '59 for the religious life of those parts of Scotland which it most deeply stirred. The words in which the appeal was given, and some of the conceptions associated with it, have an unfamiliar sound to-day [1923]. It may be said that the message laid too much stress on the saving of individual souls and too little on the social aspects of the Gospel; but none can deny that this great awakening to an intense conviction of spiritual realities was abundantly justified by its fruits--the dedication of thousands of changed lives to the service of God and man.³⁰

Dr. Benjamin R. Lacy, Jr., until recently President of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, lauds the educational, social, and political effects of the Great Awakening and says specifically of its spiritual results: "From 1740 to 1760, there was a mighty baptism of the Church of God in this land. . . . Whole families were affected and a large proportion of the present [1943] membership of our Church [the Presbyterian Church in the United States] trace their spiritual inheritance to the Great Awakening."³¹ One may say without being extravagant that tremendous advantages have accrued from the movement fathered by Jonathan Edwards.

Thirdly, Edwards cannot justly be held accountable

³⁰ G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, D. D. (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1925), p. 100.

³¹ Benjamin R. Lacy, Jr., Revivals in the Midst of the Years (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1943), pp. 43, 55.

for the strange varieties of revivalism that have since flourished from time to time in America. The noblest efforts may, by a slight perversion, become the most bizarre absurdities. The ways of a great man may be genuinely powerful and yet become utterly foolish when copied by lesser men. It took a giant to stir the boiling emotions of the Revival and at the same time remain sufficiently detached in his outlook to view the movement in its proportions, discern its faults, and guide its course. It would be too much to expect that lesser men, following him, would not grasp the visible, use the methods, and fail to attain the breadth and depth of spiritual understanding necessary to maintain a balance. He had followers in the "dynasty of New England theologians, who continued his war with liberal theology, but petrified his philosophy into dogma, reduced his revivalism to a technique for mass manipulation, and then destroyed the architecture of his thought by splintering it into factions and schools."³²

It would be disappointing if men, since the days of Edwards, had learned nothing further about biblical interpretation or the psychology of conversion; yet many a modern pastor might do well to reach back across the years and light his torch at the flame of this Puritan's

³² Miller, Jonathan Edwards, op. cit., p. 270.

evangelistic zeal. Doing so would not make a fool of a man, provided he also stretched his mind and heart to grasp the intellectual and spiritual concepts that gave direction to Edwards' preaching and provided he followed the example of Edwards in thinking and applying the message to the people of his day rather than merely mimicing methods, which would be disasterous in any generation.

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